

JUDGES

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Judges takes its title from the twelve men and one woman who served as judges during the period from Joshua's death to the time of Samuel.

This book was written during the period of the monarchy, judging by the phrase which occurs four times, "In those days there was no king in Israel." It is possible that it was written by Samuel, but the actual writer is unknown.

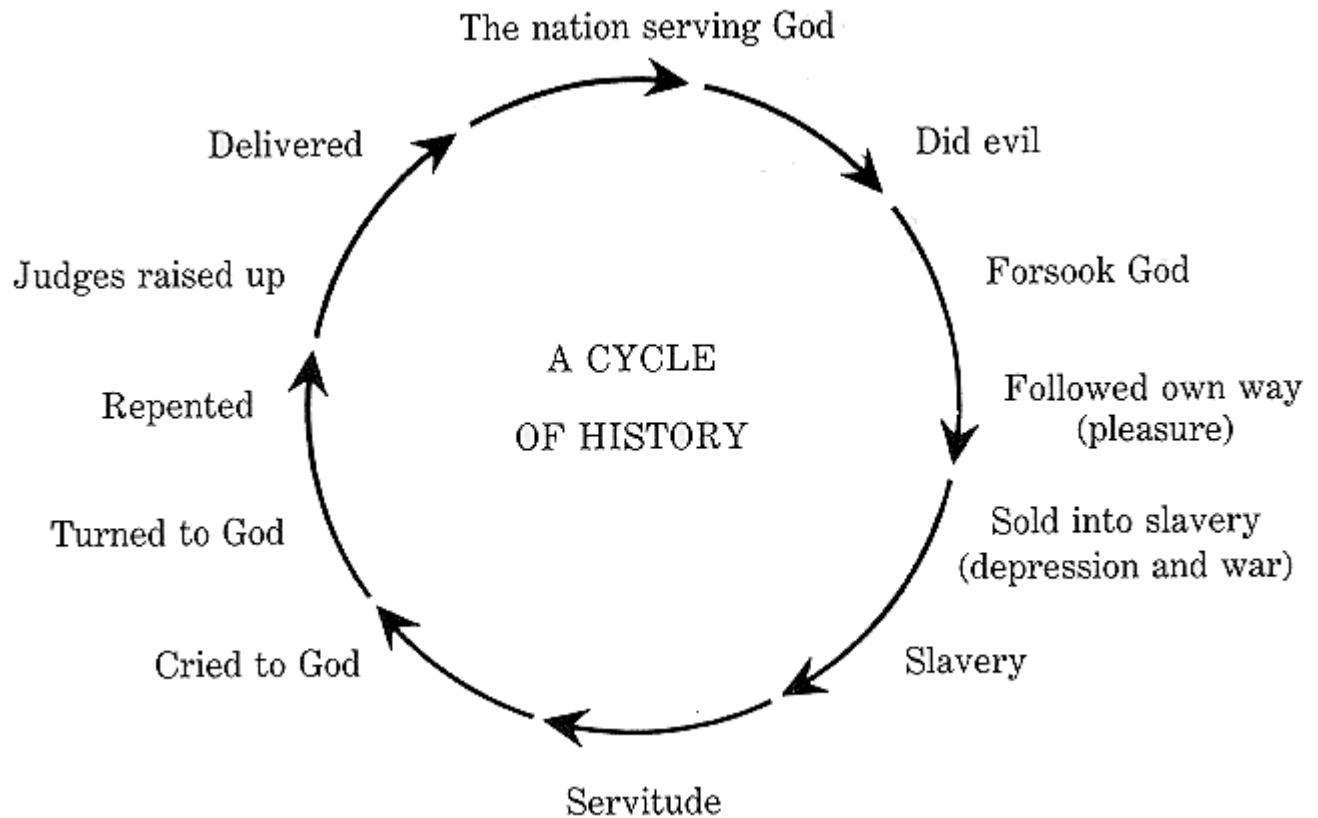
All the judges were themselves limited in their capabilities. In fact, each one seemed to have some defect and handicap which was not a hindrance but became a positive asset under the sovereign direction of God. None of them were national leaders who appealed to the total nation as Moses and Joshua had done. The record is not continuous but rather a spotty account of a local judge in a limited section of the nation.

Backsliding and the amazing grace of God in recovering and restoring is the theme of Judges. The New Scofield Reference Bible gives the theme of the Book of Judges as "Defeat and Deliverance." This is unusually appropriate. There is, however, another aspect which this book emphasizes: disappointment.

The children of Israel entered the Land of Promise with high hopes and exuberant expectation. You would expect these people -- who were delivered out of Egypt, led through the wilderness for forty years, and brought into the land with such demonstration of God's power and direction -- to attain a high level of living and victory in the land, and in their lives. Such was not the case. They failed ignobly and suffered miserable defeat after defeat.

The Book of Judges is a philosophy of history. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" ([Prov. 14:34](#)).

1. Historically it records the history of the nation from the death of Joshua to Samuel, who was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. It bridges the gap between Joshua and the rise of the monarchy. There was no leader to take Joshua's place in the way he had taken Moses' place. This was the trial period of the theocracy after they entered the land.
2. Morally it is the time of the deep declension of the people as they turned from God, the unseen Leader, and descended to the low level of "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (compare [Jud. 1:1](#) with Jud. 20:18). This should have been an era of glowing progress, but it was a dark day of repeated failure.



Picture: A Cycle Of History

The "hoop" of Israel's history begins with the nation serving God. Then they take certain steps downward. They did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baalim (see Jud. 2:11). They forsook the Lord, and they served Baal and Ashtaroth. The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of their enemies. Israel entered a time of servitude. Soon Israel cried out to God in their sad plight and distress. They turned to God and repented. God heard their prayers and raised up judges through whom they were delivered. Then again the nation served God.

Soon the same old story repeated itself. The children of Israel did evil, forsook God, followed their own pleasure, were sold into slavery, entered a period of servitude, cried out to God in their distress, turned to Him, judges were raised up, and Israel was delivered. The nation began serving God again, and they were once again at the top of the cycle. My friend, the hoop of history just turns over and over. You can follow that hoop right through the Bible, and it is still turning today. The old bromide "history repeats itself" is absolutely true.

The Book of Isaiah opens with God giving this philosophy of history. Isaiah outlines three steps that cause the downfall of nations: (1) spiritual apostasy; (2) moral awfulness; and (3) political anarchy, which is the final stage of any nation. These steps have destroyed nations down through history.

If you want to know just how up-to-date the Book of Judges is, listen to the words of the late General Douglas MacArthur: "In this day of gathering storms, as moral deterioration

of political power spreads its growing infection, it is essential that every spiritual force be mobilized to defend and preserve the religious base upon which this nation is founded; for it has been that base which has been the motivating impulse to our moral and national growth. History fails to record a single precedent in which nations subject to moral decay have not passed into political and economic decline. There has been either a spiritual reawakening to overcome the moral lapse, or a progressive deterioration leading to ultimate national disaster."

Outline

I. Introduction to the Era of the Judges, [Jdg. 1](#) through [Jdg. 2](#)

- A. Condition of Nation after Death of Joshua (Revealed in Limited Victories of Tribes of Judah, Simeon, Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, Dan), [Jdg. 1](#)
- B. God Feeds into Computer of History Israel's Cycle in Period of the Judges, [Jdg. 2](#)

II. Era of the Judges, [Jdg. 3](#) through [Jdg. 16](#)

- A. 1st Apostasy; Conquered by Mesopotamia; Delivered through Othniel, the Judge, [Jdg. 3:1-11](#)
- B. 2nd Apostasy; Conquered by Moabites and Philistines; Delivered through Ehud and Shamgar, the Judges, [Jdg. 3:12-31](#)
- C. 3rd Apostasy; Conquered by Jabin, King of Canaan, Delivered through Deborah and Barak, the Judges, [Jdg. 4:1](#) through [Jdg. 5:31](#)
- D. 4th Apostasy; Conquered by Midian; Delivered through Gideon, the Judge, [Jdg. 6:1](#) through [Jdg. 8:32](#)
- E. 5th Apostasy; Civil War; Delivered through Abimelech, Tola, Jair, the Judges, [Jdg. 8:33](#) through [Jdg. 10:5](#)
- F. 6th Apostasy; Conquered by Philistines and Ammonites; Delivered through Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, the Judges, [Jdg. 10:6](#) through [Jdg. 12:15](#)
- G. 7th Apostasy; Conquered by Philistines; Delivered Partially through Samson, the Judge, [Jdg. 13](#) through [Jdg. 16](#)

III. Results of the Era of the Judges (Confusion), [Jdg. 17](#) through [Jdg. 21](#)

- A. Religious Apostasy (The Temple), [Jdg. 17](#) through [Jdg. 18](#)
- B. Moral Awfulness (The Home), [Jdg. 19](#)
- C. Political Anarchy (The State), [Jdg. 20](#) through [Jdg. 21](#)

CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Chapter 1

THEME: Introduction to the era of the judges

Mentioned are nine of the twelve tribes, in chapter 1, in their failure to win a total victory in driving out the enemy. The three tribes not mentioned are Reuben, Issachar, and Gad. It must be assumed that they likewise failed. Each tribe faced a particular enemy. At no

time was the entire nation engaged in a warfare against any particular enemy. The weakness of the tribes is first revealed in [verse 3](#) where Judah called upon Simeon for help in his local situation.

The Condition Of Israel After The Death Of Joshua (1:1-34)

Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? [[Jud. 1:1](#)].

The weakness of the tribes is revealed from the word go. They asked the Lord what they should do and who would go for them against the Canaanites. The Canaanites were well entrenched in the land because the Israelites had failed to drive them out. They were a thorn in Israel's side during the reigns of Saul and David.

And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand [[Jud. 1:2](#)].

The Canaanites, apparently, were the principal enemy.

And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him [[Jud. 1:3](#)].

At first this looks like a fine sign of cooperation between Judah and Simeon, and it was, but it was also a sign of weakness. The tribe of Judah had no business asking for help to drive the Canaanites out of their particular portion of land. With God's help they should have been able to do it. As a result, the Canaanites were never completely driven out of the land.

And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men [[Jud. 1:4](#)].

You would think that after this first step of victory the people in Judah would be confident that God would deliver their inheritance into their hands.

And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley.

And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.

And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjath-sepher [[Jud. 1:9-11](#)].

The town Debir was a center of culture for the Canaanite people. It is called the "town of books." I guess the library was there.

And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife [[Jud. 1:12-13](#)].

Israel first took the hill country and held it the longest. The foothills, lying between the hill country and the coast, were the scene of constant fighting between Israel and the Canaanites. When the children of Israel settled in the Promised Land, they were subject to the influence and temptations of the Canaanite religion. It was a degrading religion, and they soon lapsed into idolatry and apostasy.

Whoever took this city was promised a reward, and in this case it was Caleb's daughter, Achsah. Grammatically, Othniel can be either Caleb's nephew or younger brother, but his marriage to Achsah would also classify him as a son-in-law. He undoubtedly was chosen as a judge because of his relationship to Caleb. Nepotism was prevalent even in that day. If he had been the son-in-law of Joe Doakes, he probably would never have become a judge. Many men today occupy positions of prominence, not because of their ability, but because of a certain relationship or circumstance. Napoleon called himself a man of destiny. He became prominent because of the times in which he was born. If he had lived in our generation, probably he would have been unknown. So it was with Othniel.

Nine of the twelve tribes mentioned in this chapter are mentioned in connection with failure. We have looked at the tribes of Judah and Simeon, and now Benjamin and Manasseh are the next to be considered. Failure is something that persisted in each one of the tribes.

And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day [[Jud. 1:21](#)].

That is, at the time this record was written.

Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.

And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries [[Jud. 1:27-30](#)].

The report is failure for each of them.

Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob:

But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.

Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became tributaries unto them [[Jud. 1:31-33](#)].

And they chased Dan up into the hill country.

And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley [[Jud. 1:34](#)].

This is the Promised Land -- God had given it to them! Yet not one tribe, apparently, was able to possess the land that God had given to it. How tragic!

Chapter 2

The Children Of Israel Are Rebuked For Their Disobedience (2:1-3)

And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you [[Jud. 2:1-3](#)].

I believe that the "angel of the Lord" is none other than the pre-incarnate Christ. God appeared in a form that could be perceived by the human senses. Although He had always met the need of His people, they had not obeyed His voice. This is the beginning of Israel's "hoop of history." They repeated the weary round of forsaking God, sinning, being reduced to servitude by the enemy, returning to God in repentance, being delivered by God-appointed judges, back to obedience to God.

God Raises Up Judges (2:16)

Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them [[Jud. 2:16](#)].

Each time the nation hit bottom, God raised up a judge to deliver them.

Chapter 3

THEME: First and second apostasy; God delivers Israel from servitude through her judges: Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar

The children of Israel intermarried with the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites among whom they lived. Israel did evil, forgot God, and served Baalim. God delivered them into slavery.

Othniel, the first judge, was raised up to deliver them. His only qualification seems to be that he was the nephew of Caleb and married his daughter.

Ehud, the second judge, was raised up to deliver Israel from the servitude of Eglon, king of Moab. His qualification was his being left-handed, which enabled him to gain the presence of the king without his concealed dagger being discovered.

Shamgar was the third judge, who was an expert with an ox goad. He used it as an instrument of war against the Philistines to deliver Israel.

All of the judges had some defect, some odd characteristic, or handicap which God used. The judges reveal that God can use any man who is willing to be used.

The Idolatry Of Israel Brings Servitude (3:1-8)

Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath [Jud. 3:1-3].

We find here that the Israelites had intermarried with the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. They married into all the tribes, even though God had strictly forbidden it.

The five lords of the Philistines and the other tribes mentioned in this passage were enemies of the Israelites. As we proceed through the Old Testament, these enemies will appear time and time again. They were indeed a thorn in the flesh of the nation Israel.

And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:

And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves [Jud. 3:5-7].

Instead of driving the Canaanites from the land, Israel shared it with them. Instead of maintaining their own beliefs and worship of God, they intermarried with the Canaanites and adopted their religious beliefs. The children of Israel lapsed into a period of apostasy.

Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years [Jud. 3:8].

Israel's idolatry resulted in chastisement. God sold them into slavery for eight years. They were oppressed to the point that they cried out to the Lord for help.

Othniel, The First Judge (3:9-11)

And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother [Jud. 3:9].

How gracious and compassionate the Lord is! When the children of Israel cried unto Him for deliverance, He raised up Othniel to be the first judge.

And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim.

And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died [Jud. 3:10-11].

Othniel was the first and one of the better judges. There is no great criticism leveled against him. He saved his people from the oppression of Chushan-rishathaim. The only thing is that he was not capable in himself. He did not become leader of Israel because of his outstanding ability but because he was Caleb's nephew and had married Caleb's daughter. And yet God used him. It is amazing what kind of men God will use. Maybe that is the reason He can use you and me. This book should certainly encourage us, friend.

All of the judges were "little men." There was not a big one in the lot. These men were used of God because they were -- and I have to say it -- odd characters. Their very oddness caused God to use them.

The biography of Othniel was that he was the son of Kenaz, who was Caleb's brother. The Spirit of God came upon him, and he delivered the children of Israel from oppression. He died. In a very few verses we have the life and death of this man. He had a lot going for him, but there was no glamour or anything spectacular connected with his life. Most biographies are much like this.

I met a man on the streets of Los Angeles, California, years ago who had written several fine biographies of Christian leaders of the past. He was working on a book about a present-day Christian leader, and I asked him how the work was coming along. He told me that he was having difficulty keeping the front page from rubbing against the back page. Apart from the birth and death of the man, there was little to say about him. Engraved on the tombstone of a dentist were the words: "Dr. John Smith filling his last cavity." That not only applies to dentists but to the rest of us as well.

Othniel was an ordinary man, but God came upon his simple life and made it something worthwhile. God can also touch our ordinary lives and make them worthwhile.

Ehud, The Second Judge (3:12-30)

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD:
and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel,
because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD [Jud. 3:12].

Here goes the hoop rolling down through history again. The Israelites were serving God for awhile, then they turned their backs on Him and did evil in His sight.

Ehud was one of the judges God raised up to deliver Israel. He had very little ability. I cannot find that he did anything other than kill Eglon. He just happened to be left-handed, which gave him a marvelous opportunity to get rid of a man who was bringing all kinds of tragedy into the lives of the Israelites. Ehud was the instrument God used. His act of killing Eglon accomplished the purpose. God many times uses this method to cut out a cancer of sin in order to save the body of the people. Thousands of lives were saved because of what Ehud did.

Many people will say, "Well, our civilization would not permit something like this." No one can say this honestly, however, because we dropped an atomic bomb which killed men, women, and children. War is a terrible thing.

The remarkable fact is that the only advantage Ehud had was that he was left-handed. Friend, we don't have to have unusual ability to be used of God. Do you remember William Carey? He was a humble cobbler. Dwight L. Moody had little formal education. A friend gave me a cassette tape of Dwight L. Moody's voice, taken from a record. I had never realized what a wonderful voice he had -- I would not have associated such a voice with the pictures I have seen of him. Although he did not have much of an education, he certainly sounded as though he did. Also I am reminded of G. Campbell Morgan. When he preached his first sermon in a particular church, he was turned down by the pulpit committee. They told him they did not think he could ever become a preacher. I certainly would have hated to have been responsible for that judgment because Dr. Morgan became one of the truly great Bible expositors of his time. All three of these men -- Carey, Moody, Morgan -- unpromising though they seemed, were mightily used by God.

Also there have been many men, humble men, who have been used by God in other capacities. J. C. Penney was the son of a preacher. When his father died, his mother was left without support because the church in that day did not provide a pension for a pastor's widow. He and his mother had to take in washing to exist. He resolved that some day he would make money to take care of his mother and also take care of poor preachers and their widows. Well, there is a place down in Florida named for Penney at which only retired preachers and their widows can live. God has used him in that way.

There is another man, a rancher, with whom I used to hunt down on the Brazos River. He told me that as a young fellow he had staked a claim way out in west Texas on land that was so bad nobody wanted it. The weather was so rough he had to move his family into town, and he would sleep at night on his saddle blanket with a slicker over him and a trench around him to let the water drain off. He said, "People think I was lucky to hit oil on that land, but I prayed that if God would enable me to keep it and make money, I'd use it for Him." He did just that. He established a fund that has supported many a missionary in South America.

And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees [Jud. 3:13].

When the Israelites went against God's will, He delivered them into servitude. Then what happened?

So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab [Jud. 3:14-15].

Here we go again. The hoop is rolling. Israel cried unto the Lord and He raised up a deliverer. Who was he? He was Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a left-handed man. This is a good one for you, friends. The only thing that this man had going for him was that he was left-handed, a southpaw!

But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length, and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.

And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them [Jud. 3:16-23].

This is a brutal thing that took place. It certainly lacks the heroic or romantic. His name means "red hair" and he was left-handed. He made a dagger which had two edges, and he hid it under his clothes on his right side. Now don't miss that. He was left-handed and would have to reach over on his right side to pull out the dagger. In that day almost everybody was right-handed, and they were searched on the left side to see if they carried a weapon. The king's Secret Service agents searched Ehud on the wrong side. He gained entrance by bringing a "present," which was probably the tribute. Eglon was a big fat king. After Ehud had given him the present, he pretended he had a secret to tell him. The

king sent everyone else out of the room, thinking he was going to hear a very secret message. Instead, a bloody thing was about to happen. At a convenient moment, Ehud took out the dagger and plunged it into the king. He stuck him like you would a pig. The dagger was covered by the king's fat. Then Ehud locked the doors and left.

Ehud's act was not a cowardly one. It took courage to do what he did.

When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth [Jud. 3:24-25].

The servants of Eglon, king of Moab, waited around outside of the king's door. They saw that the parlor doors were locked and thought the king was asleep. They did not wish to disturb him. They kept thinking he would wake up. They waited so long they were very embarrassed. What happened? They finally opened the doors with a key and found Eglon dead.

And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath [Jud. 3:26].

All of the time the servants were waiting for their king to awaken, Ehud had an opportunity to escape. He left the land of Moab and went to another place, Seirath by name, where they could not find him.

And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.

And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years [Jud. 3:27-30].

Shamgar, The Third Judge (3:31)

As in the days of the judges, God still uses ordinary men who want to be used to accomplish His great purposes. God can use you if you want to be used, friends.

Now here is the third judge, Shamgar.

And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel [Jud. 3:31].

In this case, it is not the man, it is the method that is remarkable. He used an ox goad, which is a very crude instrument. The Israelites just didn't have iron weapons; so he used that which he had.

I hear people say today, "Oh, we must have the best and the latest methods." It is fine to have good methods, but what about the message? It is wonderful to have airplanes that transport missionaries, but when the missionary gets to his field, is he giving out the Word of God? That's what I want to know. Television is great, but notice how it is prostituted today. The important thing is not the method, but the message.

An ox goad can be dedicated to God if it is in the right hands. Remember that God used the rod of Moses. He used a stone from the slingshot of David. And all Dorcas had was a needle and thread. Also there was a boy who had only five loaves and a few fishes. All of these things were given to God. Whatever you have, friend, if you will put it in His hand, He will use it. Think of these three judges who are mentioned in this chapter. They are three little men -- plus God.

Chapter 4

THEME: Third apostasy; God delivers Israel from oppression through Deborah and Barak

Deborah And Barak (4:1-9)

And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD,
when Ehud was dead.

And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan,
that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which
dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine
hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed
the children of Israel [Jud. 4:1-3].

After the death of Ehud, Israel again turned to idolatry, and a new period of oppression began. The Lord sold Israel into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan. Sisera, captain of the host, had nine hundred chariots of iron. These chariots caused dread among the Israelites who had no such armaments. For twenty years Jabin oppressed Israel.

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel
at that time.

And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and
Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to
her for judgment [Jud. 4:4-5].

Here we have a mother in Israel, Deborah, who is described as being both a prophetess and a judge. We are also told that she was the wife of Lapidoth, but I like to turn that around and say that Lapidoth was the husband of Deborah. She was quite a woman. She was raised up by God to judge Israel, and she called upon the general to get busy. He was

not doing his job. He should go against the enemy that Israel might be delivered from slavery.

And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go [Jud. 4:6-8].

If there ever was a general who was a sissy, it was Barak. He should have been out in the thick of the battle, but here he is hiding behind a woman's skirt. Barak will not go into battle unless Deborah goes along. If this prophetess went with him, he felt he would be successful in battle. No wonder God had to use a woman in that day!

And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh [Jud. 4:9].

Deborah promised to go with Barak but told him that a woman would be the heroine of the battle.

The Death And Defeat Of Sisera (4:16-21)

Deborah was a forthright woman who, as we shall see, wanted deliverance for her people. Barak called together his army, and they got ready to go against the enemy. God gave them the victory.

But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left [Jud. 4:16].

They exterminated the army.

Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite [Jud. 4:17].

She was a Gentile.

And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died [Jud. 4:18-21].

Since the rest of his army was destroyed, Sisera's primary desire was to save his own life. Apparently the Canaanites had not bothered the Kenites, and Sisera believed he would be safe among these people. He went to the house of Heber, and his wife Jael offered the weary soldier hospitality. Her kindness led him to believe he could trust her. When he went to sleep, she took a tent pin and hammer and let him have it, friends. She got rid of him. This brought a great deliverance for Israel.

Chapter 5

THEME: The song of Deborah and Barak

In the fourth chapter of Judges we saw the incident concerning Deborah. You will recall that they were dark days. In fact, it was dark all over the land. The incident concerning Deborah, Barak, and Jael took place in the northern part of Israel. God gave Israel a great deliverance. This song is one of praise to God and a rehearsal of the entire episode.

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day,
saying,

Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people
willingly offered themselves.

Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto
the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.

LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of
the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped,
the clouds also dropped water.

The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from
before the LORD God of Israel [Jud. 5:1-5].

Their song is very poetic, to be sure.

Deborah confesses that she is a mother in Israel and was not looking for a job at all. The fact that she took the lead is no reflection on her. She was God's choice. History affords many such examples. There was Molly Pitcher, the wife of a Revolutionary soldier, who, at the battle of Monmouth, manned the cannon at which her husband had just fallen. Other examples are Joan of Arc, the French heroine, and Zenobia, queen of Palmyra.

Deborah was one of the outstanding judges. She far exceeded Othniel in ability. It is an evidence of decline, however, when women come into the position of authority. It is a sign of weakness and of a flabby age. We have already seen that weak-kneed general, Barak. He was a sissy. He wanted to stay way back behind the fighting lines. In fact, he

wanted to stay home and did not want to fight at all. Deborah had to agree to go with him before he was willing to go and battle the enemy.

Many years ago I heard Dr. Harry Ironside tell of a woman who was preaching in a park as he and one of his friends were walking by. His friend said, "It is a shame for a woman to get up and preach like that. I deplore it. She should not be doing that." Dr. Ironside replied, "I agree with you that it is a shame, not that a woman is preaching, but that there is not a man to take her place."

Regardless of what you might think (and I know I may sound very out of date, especially in this day of women's rights), America is paying an awful price for taking women into its defense system and into industry. I made this statement as far back as 1948, and I am no prophet, but I predicted a backwash of immorality if women left the home. Well, it certainly came to pass. First there was an epidemic of women shooting their husbands, deserting their children, becoming dope peddlers, and committing suicide. There are many things that are considered a menace in our country -- inflation, crime, foreign aggression -- but I feel that the greatest danger is that women are leaving their place in the home.

Deborah actually did not want to leave her home. However, Jabin was king of the Canaanites, and God had sold Israel into slavery to them. When the time of deliverance came, Barak, who commanded Israel's army, did not want to go into battle. God, however, promised victory. The victory was won, but it was an ignominious victory for Barak.

After the battle Deborah and Barak sang a song that was one of the first songs of the human race.

In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.

The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel [Jud. 5:6-7].

The song mentions Shamgar. He was the judge, you remember, that used an ox goad. He had judged during a time of lawlessness and grave immorality. It was not safe to walk the highways; the highways were unoccupied. Travelers walked through the byways because it was not safe to take the main route. It is becoming increasingly unsafe to travel today also. Women do not dare walk the streets at night alone. Deborah knew all about this kind of danger because lawlessness reigned in her day.

Then her song mentions the lack of leadership. Rulers had ceased to rule. There was no great man who could lead. Deborah was a mother. She had a mother's heart. Very candidly, she did not want to take the lead, but there was no man to assume the leadership. How tragic was this situation. She wanted something better for her children than what she saw about her. Because of her desire, she became a judge in Israel. She stepped out and took the lead in a day when her nation had denied God.

They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? [Jud. 5:8].

Israel denied God -- as men do today -- only instead of becoming atheists, they became polytheists. They began to worship many gods. Think of the multitudes today that are living without God! Deborah did not want her children to grow up this way and that is why she stepped out as she did.

Do you remember the hopes that this country had after World War II? Everyone in the United States thought they were going to have peace at last. Many people thought they would live in peace and sin, and it would be nice. They forgot to read [Psalm 85:10](#) which says, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Friend, peace and righteousness do not even speak to each other today -- I do not even think they know each other! It is interesting that God did not let us live comfortably in peace and sin. God did not let Israel live that way either. It is also interesting to note that Israel lacked a defense. They had nothing with which to meet the enemy. Deborah sang, ". . . then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?" Israel had no help at all.

My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD [Jud. 5:9].

The conditions were not all bad. There were some godly rulers. Deborah wanted them to know that she gave them her support. It was the godless crowd that she rejected.

Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates [Jud. 5:10-11].

The gates were the place of assembly. Wherever people were going to meet, instead of talking about the common topics of the day, as they had in the past, they would talk about the righteous acts of God.

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.

Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty [Jud. 5:12-13].

After Israel's victory over the enemy, Deborah once again tells Barak to take command. But he does not take charge, and she has to continue as the leader. She found she had dominion over the mighty.

Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer [Jud. 5:14].

The tribes now join in.

And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart.

Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart [Jud. 5:15-16].

Some of the tribes didn't help. Reuben sent no reinforcements to the battle. They were not there to lend support when it was badly needed. They were neighbors and close by, but they did nothing. They felt like they should stay with their flocks and apparently did not trust someone else to watch their animals. They acted as if there was no war. They burned their draft cards and did not come. The tribe of Issachar, on the other hand, stood with Deborah and Barak.

Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches [Jud. 5:17].

Dan was busy in commerce. The folk in that tribe did not want to come to the battle. Asher continued on the seashore. You know, human nature never changes. As in Deborah's day, many folk today have let their country down, and they should not have done that.

Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field [Jud. 5:18].

These two tribes really fought.

The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money [Jud. 5:19].

Israel had some allies that were formerly enemies. They helped at the waters of Megiddo which is near what will be Armageddon one day.

They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera [Jud. 5:20].

I don't believe this is merely a poetic expression. My feeling is that it could truly be said that heaven, that God was against this enemy.

The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.

Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the prancings, the prancings of their mighty ones.

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty [Jud. 5:21-23].

Frankly, I cannot identify Meroz. However, one thing I know for sure and that is that I would not want to be an inhabitant of the city of Meroz. They did not come to help the

work of the Lord and so they were cursed. Today, also, there are multitudes of folks who are not coming to help the work of the Lord.

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be,
blessed shall she be above women in the tent [Jud. 5:24].

The heroine of the day was Jael, not Barak, in spite of her dastardly deed. But this was a time of war and the aftermath of war. All around was the holocaust of battle, broken bodies, and the fruit of war. Men's souls were blackened and scarred. The foliage of civilization was removed like thin veneer. Snarled and gnarled, the trunk of barbarianism was revealed. What Jael did was an awful thing. Woman has been created finer than man. There is something fine that has gone out of life today, and I think it centers in womanhood.

Now a mother's heart is revealed. Deborah remembers that Sisera, although he was the enemy, had a mother. And even though she extols Jael for what she did, she thinks of Sisera's mother.

The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through
the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the
wheels of his chariots?

Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,

Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man
a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers
colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both
sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? [Jud. 5:28-
30].

The mother of Sisera knew in her heart what had happened. She knew he had been slain. She had thought all of the time that he would be coming home, but he did not come. Even in this case, the heart of Deborah went out to this woman because she was a mother.

So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him
be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had
rest forty years [Jud. 5:31].

There have been mothers in the past who have overcome handicaps in evil days -- evil days like those in which Deborah lived. Read the story of Augustine. He had a marvelous mother by the name of Monica, who prayed for him. He was a debauched college professor, and he finally came to the feet of Jesus Christ. There was also Susanna Wesley who prayed for her two sons, John and Charles Wesley. Now I am not talking about worshiping womanhood or motherhood, friend, but I do want to say that we are getting far away from God's conception of it. What a picture we have in Deborah and her song!

CHAPTERS 6--8

Chapter 6

THEME: Fourth apostasy; God delivers Israel through Gideon

Gideon is the next judge. He is called to his position in chapter 6. Chapter 7 tells how mightily God used him. He is one of the most interesting judges, although not the most outstanding. In reality none of the judges were great. They were little people, marked by mediocrity. Each one was insignificant, insufficient, and inadequate. Each one had some aberration in his life. Each one of them had a glaring fault, and sometimes that fault was the very reason God chose them and used them.

I would like to add some background to this incident with some very pertinent facts. The account of the judges was discounted by the critics for many years. They said because it was not in secular history, these events actually did not take place, and there was no situation in the past into which they could be fitted. But all of that has changed now because of the spade of the archaeologist and the scholarly work of men like Burney, Moulton, Breasted, and Garstang. These outstanding conservative scholars have given us the background for the Book of Judges.

Now we know that at this particular time in history Egypt was weak, very weak. It had been a world power, but it was weak because the pharaohs who were in office were weak men. Also there were internal problems and troubles. As a result, this nation was losing its grip upon its colonies. The nomadic tribes to the east of the Dead Sea and to the south of the Dead Sea began to push in. They pushed in because there was a drought in their land. They had experienced it there for several years. So these nomadic tribes of the desert began to encroach upon the territory of Israel. The Midianites and the Amalekites were among the Bedouins of the desert who came into the land.

The story of Gideon opens with that.

Israel Sins And Is Oppressed By Midian (6:1-10)

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds [Jud. 6:1-2].

The Midianites and the Amalekites moved as a disorganized tribe. They were raiders. They would raid the crops and supplies of others. They generally took their families with them. In fact, they took all that they had with them. They would pitch their tents as they moved along. In this incident, we are not given numbers concerning them because no one in the world would have been able to number them -- they were so disorganized. But by sheer numbers, and they were many, they overwhelmed the inhabitants of the land. The children of Israel fled from their homes and lived in caves and dens. There is abundant evidence in the land of Israel today that they lived in caves, especially during the period of the judges.

It is the same old story once again. Israel sinned and the hoop started moving. God had blessed the children of Israel under the administration of Deborah. When they sinned, God delivered them to Midian, and they cried out for deliverance.

For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were

without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it [Jud. 6:5].

The Midianites came up against the children of Israel. They were like a plague of grasshoppers as they came into the land. They came "without number," which means that they had not been counted. They were such a large company that certainly the enemy could not count them. The Midianites saw that Israel had good crops, and they needed grain and foodstuff for themselves and for their animals.

The tribe of Manasseh, of which Gideon was a member, occupied the plain in which was located the Plain of Esdraelon (the place where Armageddon will be fought). Although they had occupied that territory, when these nomads came into that area, they took to the hills; they moved into the dens and into the caves up there. They had to. They saw their crops which they had left all taken by the enemy. This is the historical period into which the story of Gideon is cast.

And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice [Jud. 6:7-10].

Here goes Israel again, whining and complaining. But God is gracious and good. A prophet came and told them why they were in their present condition. They cried out to God, and God in mercy sent them another judge.

Gideon, The Sixth Judge (6:11-23)

Now at this juncture, God appeared to Gideon in a most embarrassing situation. We are told:

And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites [Jud. 6:11].

Gideon is not introduced to us as a hero or an outstanding man. Do you know what he is doing? He is threshing wheat by the winepress. Now the winepress is the key to this entire situation. You see, in that day the winepress was always put at the foot of the hill because they brought the grapes down from the vineyard. Naturally, they would carry the heavy grapes downhill; they carried them to the lowest place. In contrast, the threshing floor was always put up on the top of the hill, the highest hill that was available, in order to catch the wind which would drive the chaff away. Here we find Gideon, down at the bottom of the hill, threshing. Now that would be the place to take the grapes, but that is

no place to take your crop in order to do your threshing. Can you see the frustration of this man? Why doesn't he go to the hilltop? Well, he is afraid of the Midianites. He does not want them to see that he is threshing wheat. And you can imagine his frustration. There is no air getting to him down there, certainly no wind. So he pitches the grain up into the air. And what happens? Does the chaff blow away? No. It comes down around his neck and gets into his clothes making him very uncomfortable. There he is, trying his best to thresh in a place like that, and all the time rebuking himself for being a coward, afraid to go to the hilltop. I think he looked up there rather longingly and thought, "Do I dare go to the hilltop?" Gideon was having a very frustrating experience, but God was going to use this man. We will see why God used this kind of a man.

It was at that time that the angel of the Lord, which many of us believe was none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, appeared to him. We are told:

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him,
The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour [Jud. 6:12].

Don't tell me, friend, that there is no humor in the Bible. Don't you think it sounds humorous to call Gideon a mighty man of valour? God has a wonderful sense of humor. The Bible is a serious book, of course. It deals with a race that is in sin, and it concerns God's salvation for that race. It reveals God as high and holy and lifted up. But God has a sense of humor and, if you miss that in the Bible, you will not find it nearly as interesting.

Jesus Christ has a great sense of humor. One day He said to the Pharisees, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" ([Matt. 23:24](#)). If you don't think that is funny, the next time you see a camel, look at it. A camel has more projections on it than some of our space vehicles. I rode a camel in Egypt and found out they even have horns. They also have the biggest Adam's apple in the world. They have pads on their knees, great big hoofs, and some have one hump, and some have two humps. Everywhere you look at them there is a projection. Can't you see these religious rulers trying to swallow camels? God indeed has a sense of humor.

One of the funniest things the Lord could have called Gideon was a mighty man of valour because he was actually a coward. I think that when Gideon looked up and saw Him and heard Him say, "Thou mighty man of valour," he looked behind him to see if there wasn't somebody else there, because that term did not apply to him. And then he turned to the angel and said, "Who? Me? Do you mean to call me a mighty man of valour when I am down here at the winepress pitching grain up into the air when I ought to be up yonder on top of the hill? If I were a mighty man of valour, that is where I would be, not down here. I am nothing in the world but a coward." The Lord does want to encourage him, of course, but the point is that it was a rather humorous title that the Lord gave to this man.

Well, God has called him now to this office to deliver his people, and He has called a most unusual man. This man is suffering from an inferiority complex.

And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us,
why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which
our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from
Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into
the hands of the Midianites [Jud. 6:13].

Now the angel of the Lord did not say that He was with Israel at this time; He was with Gideon. Frankly, He was not with Israel because of their sin. The angel said, "The Lord is with thee" -- singular -- with you, Gideon. But Gideon cannot believe that God would be with him. He wants to know where all those miracles are that their fathers had told them about. He believed that the Lord had forsaken Israel. He was as wrong as a man could be. The Lord had not really forsaken them; they had forsaken the Lord.

This man is in a bad state mentally and a bad state spiritually. Actually, he not only had an inferiority complex, he was skeptical, he was cynical, he was weak, and he was cowardly. That is this man Gideon. What a wrong impression is given of him today when he is described as a knight in shining armor, a Sir Lancelot, or a Sir Galahad. Why, he was nothing in the world but a Don Quixote charging a windmill, my beloved. He was the biggest coward that you have ever seen. But this was the man that God called.

And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? [Jud. 6:14].

This is the call and commission of Gideon. It is a commission of courage. It is interesting to note, however, that even at this point Gideon did not believe God. Note what Gideon says:

And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house [Jud. 6:15].

Now consider for a moment the position Gideon occupies in his own thinking. He said in effect, "You certainly are not asking me to do this. To begin with, I belong to the nation Israel. We are now under the heel of the Midianites." It was bad enough to be under Egypt, but imagine being under these nomads of the desert, the Midianites! "We are in slavery. Here we are hiding, and here I am threshing at the foot of the hill. And you come and call me? Well, to begin with, the tribe of Manasseh (one of the sons of Joseph) is not noted for anything; we have had no conspicuous men. In the tribe of Manasseh, my family is not very well known. We are sort of ne'er-do-wells. We are not prominent folk. In my family I happen to be the very least one. You made a big mistake in calling me because you happen to have called the smallest pebble that is on the beach." Honestly, this man felt that he was the last man in Israel to be used of God. And do you know that he was right? He was the last man in Israel that God should have called.

Our problem today, friend, is that most of us are too strong for God to use. Most of us are too capable for God to use. You notice that God uses only weak men, don't you?

[1Corinthians 1:26-27](#) tells us that this is so: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." God used all of these judges but not because they were capable or outstanding. Does that encourage you, friend? Do you know why God does not use most of us? We are too strong. Most of us have too much talent for God to use us. Most of us today are doing our own will and going our own way. There are multitudes of people, talented people, people with ability,

whom God is not using. Do you know why? They are too strong for God to use. Paul mentions this: "And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" ([1Cor. 1:28-29](#)). There is something wrong with any Christian worker who is proud. God does not use the flesh. Anything that this poor preacher does in the weakness of the flesh and boasts about is despised by God. God hates it and cannot use it. God wants weak vessels, and that is the only kind he will use. God follows this policy so that no flesh will glory in His presence. When God gets ready to do anything, He chooses the weakest thing He can get in order to make it clear that He is doing it, not the weak arm of the flesh. That is God's method.

Remember Moses down in the bulrushes was only a little baby. Then look at Pharaoh Ramses II, the strongest of the pharaohs, who sat on the throne. He is the one who built the great cities of Egypt. Put the one down by the side of the other -- the little weak, helpless baby and the powerful Pharaoh on the throne -- and whom will you take? Of course you would take the Pharaoh because he is the strong one. But God took the little fellow in the bulrushes to demonstrate that He uses the weak things of the world to confound the wise.

Also God chose a man by the name of Elijah. Elijah was not a weak man, but he had to become weak. God had to put that man through a series of tests. He schooled him in the desert and finally forced him to listen to the still, small voice of God. And Elijah did not much care for still, small voices. This is the man who liked the three-ring circus, the fireworks, the noise and the fanfare, but God had to train him and let him know that He chooses the weak things of the world. After Elijah walked into the court of Ahab and Jezebel, he told them it would not rain for several years. Then God put him out by the brook Cherith. There as he saw the brook dry up, he found out that his life was no more than a dried-up brook. Later he looked down into an empty flour barrel, but he could sing the doxology. When he did, God fed him and the widow's family out of that empty flour barrel. Why? Because God chooses and uses weak things.

Then consider Simon Peter. Whoever would have chosen him? Why, everybody knew he was as weak as water, and our Lord said, "You are going to be a rock-man. I will make you as stable as a rock." I imagine everybody laughed when He said that. Even Simon Peter gave up on one occasion and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man" ([Luke 5:8](#)). What he is really saying is this, "Why don't you give me up and go get somebody else? I am such a failure." But the Lord Jesus said, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" ([Luke 5:10](#)). In effect He said, "You are the very one I want. You are going to preach the first sermon on the day of Pentecost which will bring three thousand people to Me. I am going to demonstrate that I can use the weakest thing in the world." God always does that, my beloved. The interesting thing is, someone has said, that Nero was on the throne while Paul was being beheaded. At first glance, it looked like Paul had lost and Nero had won. But history had already handed down its decision. Men name their sons Paul and call their dogs Nero. This is quite interesting, is it not? God is choosing the weak things of this world.

Have you ever compared that little Baby in Bethlehem with Caesar Augustus who could sign a tax bill and the whole civilized world was taxed? Which would you pick? I would

take the tax-gatherer every time because he seems to have a lot of power, but God took that little Baby in Bethlehem, for He was His Son. God always chooses that way.

Although Gideon was a very weak individual, God told him that he was the one who was going to deliver Israel. Yes, God is going to use Gideon, but first He must train him. Gideon had to overcome his fear and develop courage. He needed faith to help strengthen his feeble knees and make him patient. I want you to notice some of the training that he went through. He immediately, you see, was afraid; so God gave him his first lesson.

And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die [Jud. 6:23].

He said, "Thou shalt not die," because Gideon feared that he would die after seeing God. And he told Gideon to go to his own hometown, to begin there by throwing over the altar of Baal, and burning the grove that was by it. All of this represented the worst sort of immorality.

Gideon Repudiates Baal: Israel Called To Arms (6:24-38)

Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night [Jud. 6:24-27].

And so Gideon begins his adventure. Even with God's commission he is still afraid. Instead of obeying God in the bold daylight, he does it under the cover of darkness. But they find out who did it, and they are ready to execute Gideon. But God again delivers him.

Gideon is still hesitant. God has to overcome the fear. God has to develop courage and faith. God has to strengthen Gideon's feeble knees. It is a patient, long ordeal. The next step is to fill this man with His Spirit -- God has always given a filling of the Spirit to the man that He uses.

But the spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him [Jud. 6:34].

The blowing of the trumpet meant war. The minute he blew the trumpet, his people knew it meant war against the Amalekites, and they began to gather unto him.

Do you know what happened? Gideon got cold feet and went back to the Lord with a proposition.

And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand,
as thou hast said,

Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on
the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I
know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the
fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full
of water [Jud. 6:36-38].

The next day Gideon went back (and I am of the opinion that he intended to do this all the time regardless of the outcome of the first test because if you put out a fleece here in California it would be damp, whereas the ground would be dry). He gave a two-way test that could not be gainsaid. He said, "Now, Lord, I will put out the fleece again. If You are really in this thing, put the dew around everywhere else and let the fleece remain dry." I am glad he did it that way because, frankly, I would be skeptical enough to believe it "just happened" the first time. Or let us say that it was natural for it to happen one way, but it was supernatural for it to happen the other way. This man asked God to put dew on the fleece and then for God not to put dew on the fleece. How gracious God was to Gideon. We will find that God will gradually school this man until He brings him to the place where Gideon can see that there is nothing in him. Then God will use him to win a mighty battle.

Now, looking back at [verses 34](#) and 35, we see that men for his army had come to him from everywhere. When a trumpet is blown in Israel, it means war. And frankly, friend, he was the last man you would want to gather around. He certainly was not a man prepared to lead them into battle. So God begins to move in this man's life in a definite way, as we shall see in chapter 7.

Chapter 7

Three Hundred Alert Soldiers Are Chosen (7:1-7)

Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me [Jud. 7:1-2].

Now Gideon goes out and looks at his army. He had thirty-two thousand men, and the thought in Gideon's mind is that this is not enough. The Midianites were like grasshoppers on the hills. They were disorganized, but by sheer numbers they would have overcome the Israelites. Therefore, his men were too few, and I think Gideon was ready to blow the trumpet again. But God said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot give you the victory with thirty-two thousand men because you would boast and say that you did it in your own strength, power, and might." No flesh is going to glory in God's

presence. That is the reason God has to use weak instruments today. This is the method. He continues to follow. He is going to cut down the number of the army.

Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand [Jud. 7:3].

Gideon had thirty-two thousand men and now he has lost twenty-two thousand of them! You may recall God's condition, as put down in the Mosaic system in the Book of Deuteronomy that if anyone was drafted into the army and was afraid, he could go home.

I have often wondered why Gideon did not go home. When he said, "All of you who are fearful and afraid," he could have said, "Follow me, because I am going home, I am more afraid than anyone here." He had to stay, however. God had commissioned him.

Now Gideon has only ten thousand men, and that is enough to make anyone afraid. But God says, "Really, you still have too many men. You have to reduce this number. I cannot give you victory with this number of men in your army." So Gideon and his men went through another test.

So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.

And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place [Jud. 7:5-7].

Do you know what we have here? It is one of the finest lessons concerning divine election and man's free will. This is the way they work together. God said to Gideon, "I am going to choose the men that I want to go with you, but the way I will do it is to let them make the choice. Bring them down to the water, and the ones who lap water like a dog, just going through and throwing it into their mouths, are the ones I have chosen. You can put aside those men who get down on all fours and take their time drinking. I don't want them."

Had we been there (ours is a great day for interviewing the man on the street), we could have had interviews with the men in Gideon's army. For example, let us take the man that is down on all fours. We would go up to him and say, "Brother, why did you get down on all fours?" "Well," he would reply, "I was just wondering why I didn't go home with the other crowd. I have been thinking this thing over and I have a wife and family, and I just do not think I ought to be here. I feel like I should have gone home. I have no heart for this." He made his choice, but God also made His choice. That is divine election and human free will. You see, God elects, but He lets you be the one to make the choice. Then we go to the man that lapped water like a dog, and went to the other side of the

stream. "Why did you lap water like that?" we ask him. He says, "Where are the Midianites?" "Wait just a minute," we reply. "Why did you do that?" He replies, "Because I am with Gideon one hundred percent!" May I say to you that these three hundred men had a heart for battle. If you had said to any one of these three hundred men, "Say, did you know that God has elected you?" he would have replied, "I don't know what you are talking about. The thing is that I want to go after these Midianites!"

You can argue about divine election and free will all you want to, but it works. You cannot make it work out by arguing, but it sure works out in life, friend. Each one of the ten thousand men in Gideon's army exercised his free will. God did not interfere with one of them as far as their free wills were concerned. Today God, through His Son Jesus Christ, offers you the free gift of salvation. It is a legitimate offer. It is a sincere offer from God Himself. He says, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" ([John 6:37](#)). Now don't tell me that you can argue about election right now. You cannot. You can come to God if you want to come. If you don't come, I have news for you -- you were not elected. If you do come, I have good news for you -- you were elected. That is the way God moves.

Now these three hundred men often have been misunderstood. As a student, I went down to a little church in Georgia. When I got there, a dear little lady wearing a sunbonnet said to me, "Mr. McGee, we have here just a little Gideon's band." They didn't have a Gideon's band! They had the most discouraged, lazy folk I have ever seen in my life. That is not Gideon's band. Gideon's band was a group of dedicated men, willing to die to deliver Israel, men who had their hearts and souls in this matter. May I say to you that these men lapped up water like a dog because they were after the Midianites and not after water. They will drink after the battle is over.

I once watched a football game, and then I listened to the interview of the quarterback of the Arkansas team. Even after the game, he was so excited and so emotional that he took no credit for himself. He gave his team the credit for winning. He said, "We were determined to win." That is Gideon's band, friend, and that is the thing that is needed today in the church, if you please.

Israel's Victory Over Midian (7:10-22)

But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host:

And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host.

And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.

And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and

came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host [Jud. 7:10-14].

This is Gideon's final lesson before he goes into battle. He goes down to the edge of the camp and eavesdrops while two soldiers are talking. They frankly believe that God is going to deliver the Midianites into the hands of Gideon and his host. God permits Gideon to hear this conversation to encourage him just prior to the battle.

And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do.

When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath [Jud. 7:16-22].

This is the record given of Gideon's strategy. He divides his three hundred men into three groups. They are given three things: pitchers, lamps, and trumpets. The lamps were put inside the pitchers so that the light could not be seen, and they held them in one hand and their trumpets they held in the other hand. When they went into battle, their cry was to be, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." The interesting thing is that Gideon did not have a sword and neither did any of the three hundred men. You see they were under the rule of the Midianites, and the Midianites did not let them have an arsenal. They kept the weapons and the swords for themselves. So Gideon's strategy employed pitchers, lamps, and trumpets.

As we have said before, the Midianites and Amalekites were among the nomadic tribes of the desert. They had raided the land of Israel and seized their crops and supplies. They

had a very loose organization. They moved as disorganized nomads through the desert and did not have an organized army. They had set a few guards about the camp but most of the people were asleep, here, there, and yonder. They did not expect to be attacked at night. To begin with, it is difficult to see at night. So Gideon posted his three hundred men in three groups around the camp. At a certain time they blew their trumpets and broke the pitchers so that the light shone out. Each trumpet represented the fact that there were probably several hundred of the enemy present. Imagine the Midianites waking out of a sound sleep. The first thing they did was start whacking their swords in every direction. The Israelites did not have swords. All they did was hold the light so the Midianites could go after each other. It was a regular riot! The Midianites soon fled over the hills into the tall timber and out of the area. This gave Gideon and the Israelites a tremendous victory.

There are some wonderful spiritual lessons in this account. First of all, I would like to go back to this matter of the dew on the fleece. We need God today to do an interior decorating job on our lives. We need to ask Him for dew on our barren lives. In [Hosea 14:5](#) God says, "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." God speaks about this subject several times. "And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath" ([Deut. 33:13](#)). "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass" ([Prov. 19:12](#)). "By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew" ([Prov. 3:20](#)). Finally, in [Psalm 133:1-3](#), God says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." God has blessed in this way. We need that touch -- that fresh touch. We need it like dew upon the rosebud and the grass in the morning. We need a tender touch.

[Hosea 14:5](#) tells us that the lily is delicate. He, our Lord God, will come down upon us like rain upon the mown grass. Even when we are in trouble, and He has cut us down, He will come down upon us like rain. Our Lord could weep over Jerusalem, but do we weep today over sinners? The Publican could smite his breast and cry out about his sin, but what about us today? We need a touch from God that will make us strong and stable, grounded and settled. Oh that we could say with the psalmist, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise" ([Ps. 57:7](#)).

We need the dew of God upon our lives to bring purity into our lives. Peter tells us in [2Peter 3:14](#), "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." This is what we need today. God uses only a clean cup. [1Peter 1:16](#) says, "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." God says this to us. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" ([2Cor. 7:1](#)). What a wonderful picture and lesson we have here.

Now let us look at another spiritual lesson concerning the pitchers. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels . . ." ([2Cor. 4:7](#)). Those pitchers represent the bodies of

believers. That is what Paul means when he says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies [your total personalities] a living sacrifice . . . unto God . . ." ([Rom. 12:1](#)). That is the reason we ought not to glory in any man. Paul says that. "Therefore let no man glory in men . . ." ([1Cor. 3:21](#)). That is the earthen vessel. We have this treasure in earthen vessels -- pitchers. Some of us are not broken and, as a result, the light does not shine through. It is not our light that we should shine, but the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. His light should shine through us. It can only shine in a broken life. We are to shine as lights in the world. Paul told the Philippians, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" ([Phil. 2:14-15](#)).

Let's look for a moment at the trumpets. [1Corinthians 14:8](#) says, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" This speaks of the testimony and witness of believers. The testimony and witness of believers must be certain and clear.

Chapter 8

Forty Years Of Peace Under Gideon (8:22-31)

Chapter 8 is a continuance of the record of Gideon, the judge. Here you find events that came to pass after the remarkable deliverance that God gave Gideon over the Midianites. The children of Israel are free again and, as a result, they are prosperous. Zebah and Zalmunna, Midianite kings, have been pursued and slain. The Israelites are being blessed for the first time in a long time, and they are so grateful to Gideon for all that he has done that they want him to rule over them.

Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian [[Jud. 8:22](#)].

This is the first indication given to us in Scripture that the children of Israel wanted a king to rule over them. God told them at the beginning that He did not want them to have a king like the nations round about them. But because Gideon had delivered them from bondage, they wanted him to accept the position of king. He apparently is the first one to have been offered this high position, and he turned it down. Later on we will discover that Israel asks for a king again. In fact, they insist upon having a king, and finally they demand one. Then God tells Samuel (who is the last of the judges and the first in the line of the prophets) that he is to anoint a king for them. Also God makes it clear that Israel is not rejecting Samuel, but is rejecting God. God wanted to rule over His people. The form of government for Israel was to be a theocracy. In this case, it was God who had used Gideon so remarkably, but it is Gideon whom Israel wants to rule over them. They not only want Gideon to rule, but his son and his son's son also. This means that they want a king like the nations around them.

Notice the remarkable answer that Gideon gave the people.

And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you [[Jud. 8:23](#)].

Gideon certainly had learned a lesson; there is no question about it. This young man who threshed grain down by the winepress, recognized that he was a coward. He knew that it was God who had given him the victory. He knew he had no strength in himself to win the battle, but he realized God had raised him up for this purpose. Gideon was indeed a remarkable person. He is mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 where the "Heroes of the Faith" are listed. In fact, he leads the list of judges. He is also ahead of David in the list. "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" ([Heb. 11:32-34](#)). The writer of Hebrews says that time would fail to tell everything about these men, and he wanted to tell about Gideon. God raised up Gideon to perform an extraordinary task. It teaches us that any man or woman that God uses has to be used on God's terms. And He chooses the weak things of this world.

It seems as though each judge had some glaring weakness and in most cases God used it. Gideon's weakness was the fact that he was a coward. At times I have felt very close to this man in my ministry. When I became pastor of the great Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, California, in 1949, I preached my first message on Gideon. I put myself in his class. I came to that congregation in weakness. The only reason I could see that God called me was because I was like Gideon -- weak and cowardly. I have rejoiced in the fact that God did for me what He did for Gideon. God certainly was with me, and I have always been grateful to Him. I have discovered that when I get in the way (and I do sometimes), then I stumble and fall. But as long as I am willing to let God have His way, it is remarkable what He will do. I give God all of the glory for my radio ministry, friend. I never sought it. I did not start out after it. Like Topsy, it "just grewed." God has blessed it, and I rejoice in it. He has been wonderful.

I wish we could end the story of Gideon here, but he had another weakness.

[And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.](#)

[And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech \[Jud. 8:30-31\].](#)

Gideon had many wives and a concubine besides. He had a total of seventy-one sons. That is a real blot on this man's life. Now someone will say, as they did about Solomon, "How could God use a man like this and why did He use him?" Well, Gideon took these many wives and had all these children after the battle. And the fact of the matter is that God used him in spite of this. God did not approve of what he did. The record makes it clear that his actions brought tragedy to the nation of Israel. The next chapter brings that out. God had forbidden intermarriage outside the nation. He had forbidden the Israelites to have more than one wife. God did not create several Eves for Adam. He created only one. God did not remove all of Adam's ribs. God took out only one rib.

Abraham, you remember, took a concubine, that little Egyptian maid named Hagar and, believe me, it caused trouble. God never sanctioned it. Through Abraham's son Isaac

came the nation Israel. The Arabs are descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar. I talked to an Arab guide in Jericho who was very proud of the fact that he was a son of Abraham. He was also a Moslem. He said proudly, "I am a son of Abraham through Ishmael." That is true. That was the sin of Abraham, and God never blessed that, friend. God did not bless Solomon's actions in this connection, and He is not going to bless Gideon either. In fact, Gideon's actions split the kingdom and caused real tragedy. This is the blot in his life. God does not hide anything. God paints the picture of man as it is. Now if a friend of Gideon had been his biographer, he probably would have left this part of his life out of the story. God, however, did not. He paints mankind in all of his lurid, sinful color.

Confusion After Gideon's Death (8:33-35)

And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a-whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.

And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:

Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel [Jud. 8:33-35].

This is the same old story, is it not? The hoop of history continues to roll as it is rolling today. At first they were a nation who served God, then they did evil, forsook God, turned to Baal, and God sells them into slavery and servitude. Then they cry out to God. Then they repent, and God raises up a judge to deliver them. Here goes Israel again. As soon as Gideon was dead, the children of Israel, turned from God and went a-whoring after Baalim. That is the sad, sordid story of Israel, and also the story of His church today. This up and down business is the story of nations, churches, and individuals. Today many of us are just rolling a hoop through this world. One day we are up, and the next day we are down. God never intended our spiritual lives to be that way.

CHAPTERS 9 AND 10

Chapter 9

THEME: Fifth apostasy; Abimelech responsible for civil war

The Career Of Abimelech, Gideon's Son (9:1-57)

This chapter records the story of Abimelech, the sinful and wicked son of Gideon and his concubine. You see, Gideon should not have had a concubine. It certainly caused trouble in the nation.

And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,

Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are

threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.

And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother [Jud. 9:1-3].

This boy Abimelech is very ambitious. He had heard about the nation wanting Gideon to become ruler over them. Since he is a son of Gideon, he wants to become king. So he goes to his mother's people, who are in Shechem, and gets them to follow him.

And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being three score and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself [Jud. 9:5].

Obviously, Abimelech is a wicked and brutal man. He does a horrible thing here.

Some Bible expositors rate Abimelech as a judge. He may have been a judge, at least it is said that he "reigned three years over Israel." Dr. James M. Gray wrote, "The usurped rule of Abimelech, the fratricide, is not usually counted [as a judge]." He brutally murdered the seventy sons of Gideon and set himself up as king. His abortive reign reveals, I feel, the truth of the statement in Daniel: ". . . the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" ([Dan. 4:17](#)). Even today when a good ruler comes into office, many folk say, "God raised him up." What about the wicked ruler? God permits him to come to the throne also. Do you know why? Because the principle is "like priest, like people." That is, people get the ruler they deserve. The people of Israel wanted this boy Abimelech to rule over them; and they got the caliber of man they deserved. Friend, when we look around our world today, we find this principle is still true.

Now we find that God judges Abimelech for the awful thing he did, and He also judges the men of Shechem for making him king and starting him out on such a course. Civil war ensued because there were many people who did not want Abimelech, of course.

And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull.

Then he called hastily unto the young man his armour-bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place.

Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:

And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal [Jud. 9:52-57].

This is a sad ending for the life of Gideon who fathered this illegitimate son, Abimelech. God lifted Gideon from a very humble position to be the deliverer and judge of His people. How sad that a man who accomplished so much good should allow this in his life of which God did not approve and which resulted in civil war in Israel.

Chapter 10

Tola, The Seventh Judge (10:1-2)

Tola and Jair become the next judges. Maybe you have never heard of Tola. If you haven't, it is perfectly all right. He did nothing noteworthy.

And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.

And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir [Jud. 10:1-2].

What did Tola do? He died and was buried in Shamir. Not one thing is recorded about any achievements. Although he was a judge in Israel twenty-three years, there is not one thing that can be mentioned about the deeds of this man, from the day he was born to the day he died. All you have here is what is on his tombstone: "Born -- died."

Jair, The Eighth Judge (10:3-5)

And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years.

And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead.

And Jair died, and was buried in Camon [Jud. 10:3-5].

All that we are told about this man is that he had thirty sons and he bought each one of them a little donkey. He did not get them a Jaguar, Mustang, Pinto, or Cougar, he gave each boy a donkey. What a sight it must have been to see these thirty boys ride out of Gilead!

In Jair's story I can see three things: (1) prosperity without purpose; (2) affluence without influence; (3) prestige without power.

In that day a donkey was a mark of prosperity. That was the thing that denoted a man's wealth. For example, [Judges 5:10](#) says, "Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way." This verse speaks about the upper echelon, or the establishment. The donkey was a mark of wealth and was the animal that kings rode upon. There has always been a question about whether or not they had horses in that day. In Scripture the little donkey is the animal of peace and the horse is the animal of war

(the horse was imported into that land). But the little donkey was actually the mark of prosperity and the mark of a king.

You remember that the Lord Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on a little donkey. We misinterpret [Zechariah 9:9](#) which says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Zechariah does not mean that the Lord Jesus is humble because He is riding on a little donkey. He is humble in spite of the fact that He is riding upon an animal which only kings ride. If He had not been King, it would really have been a presumption to ride into Jerusalem on that donkey as He did and receive all of the adulation and hosannas from the crowd that day.

Jair was obviously a man of wealth and prominence to be able to afford thirty donkeys. He gave each one of his sons a donkey, so he must have had a thirty-car garage! This was the mark of a benevolent father. He was generous, and I think he spoiled his sons. He got them what they wanted. They lived in the lap of luxury and with golden spoons in their mouths. Donkeys probably came in several models, and Jair bought each son the latest thing. But did these donkeys bring glory to God? Did they make Jair a better judge? Did they bring blessing to the people? Did any one of these boys go out as a missionary? No. They lived in Gilead.

It is true that there is nothing particularly wrong with donkeys. On the other hand, there is nothing particularly right with a man who is a judge and spends a whole lot of time with many boys and donkeys. This is important for us to see. Our Lord rode into Jerusalem on a little donkey to fulfill prophecy and to present Himself as King, and the hosannas were sung. Satan was angry and the religious rulers protested as Christ rode through the gate and into the city. But all of Jair's donkeys never lifted one hosanna. When these animals brayed, I think Satan smiled and the mob was entertained. Jair is a picture of prosperity without purpose, friend, and it is a dangerous thing. We see the same picture in the days of Noah when they were marrying and giving in marriage. This is also demonstrated in the account of Solomon sending out ships to bring back apes and peacocks -- peacocks for beauty and apes for entertainment.

Years ago a high school class in the state of Washington came up with this motto for their graduating class: "Pep without purpose is piffle." Well, it is not much of a motto, but it certainly expresses present-day conditions. We have prosperity but without purpose. May I ask you what the goal of your life is? Is it pointless? Is it aimless? Have you found life pretty boring? Shakespeare's Hamlet said, "How stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me the uses of this world." What we need today is direction and dimension in our lives. We need a cause, and the cause of Jesus Christ is still the greatest challenge any man can have. Old Jair was some judge, wasn't he?

Jair's days were also marked by prestige without power. He was the outstanding man in the community. The traffic cops probably never gave any of his sons a ticket. But [verse 5](#) does not speak of a monument for Jair. He was buried in an unknown spot. He never performed one conspicuous act. He never did a worthwhile deed. He never gained a victory. He may have had thirty donkeys, but he had no spiritual power. We are living in a day when the church has lost its power. What a picture we have in this man Jair.

Right before World War II, the city of Pasadena was having its annual Rose Parade. The float that was entered by the Standard Oil Company was covered with American Beauty roses. It was a sight to behold. The theme of the parade was, "Be prepared." Right in the middle of the parade the Standard Oil Company's float ran out of gas. It stopped right where I was viewing the parade. I couldn't help but laugh. If there was one float that should not have run out of gas, it was that one. Standard Oil Company should have had plenty of gas! As I looked at the float, I saw a picture of many Christians today. They are beautiful, but they have no power in their lives. They have beauty and prestige, but no power. That was judge Jair for you. He did nothing, died, and was buried.

Eighteen Years Of Servitude Under The Philistines And Ammonites (10:6-18)

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him [Jud. 10:6].

You would think that after all their experiences, the Israelites would learn that when they turned to idolatry, trouble came upon them. Because of their idolatry, they went into slavery again -- they served the Philistines and Ammonites for eighteen years. Human nature is fallen nature. Jeremiah has said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" ([Jer. 17:9](#)). You and I certainly do not know the heart. It is easier for us to point our finger back to these people who lived about one thousand years before Christ and say, "You did wrong," than it is for us to see what we are doing wrong.

How are we doing today, by the way? May I say that there is a frightful apostasy today in the church. Human nature is like that, and we are in a nation that is in trouble. We have tried every method, political scheme, and political party, and none of them has worked. What is wrong? We have gone to the wrong place for help. Only a turning to God will get us on the right path. I know that sounds square and out of date, but it sounded that way one thousand years before Christ also. The Israelites turned to other gods, refused to serve the living God, and look at what happened.

And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon [Jud. 10:7].

God can afford to remove His instrument when that instrument fails Him. A great many people think that God has to have the church, even a particular church, and that God has to have America because it is sending out missionaries. May I say to you that God does not have to have any of us. He is not dependent upon us at all. We are, however, dependent upon Him.

Israel was probably at its lowest point at this time. Things were very bad for them.

And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim [Jud. 10:10].

These people finally got so desperate that they turned to God. Here we see the same old story being acted out once again. It is the hoop of history that is rolling, and it is still rolling today. So then what happened?

And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, from the Amorites, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?

The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.

Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.

Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.

And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel [Jud. 10:11-16].

How merciful and gracious God is!

Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh.

And the people and princes of Gilead said to one another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead [Jud. 10:17-18].

The Israelites lacked leadership. That is always characteristic of men, or of a generation, that have turned from God. Lack of leadership has definitely characterized our nation for the last twenty-five years. In fact, there has been a lack of leadership in the world for many years. We need vital leadership, but we cannot seem to find it. This was Israel's experience. Now they are going to turn to a most unusual man for guidance. Under normal circumstances they would not have turned to him at all.

Chapter 11

THEME: Jephthah, the ninth judge, and his rash vow

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah [Jud. 11:1].

The first thing that I would call to your attention is that he is an outstanding leader, but he has this black mark against him: he is illegitimate, the son of a harlot.

And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman [Jud. 11:2].

[Proverbs 2:16](#) speaks of "the strange woman" whom the son should beware because harlots were strangers -- that is, foreigners. Josephus tells us that Gilead's wife was a Gentile. Jewish writings have called her an Ishmaelite. So Jephthah was the son of a common heathen prostitute. Illegitimacy is a stigma that brands a person from birth, regardless of who he is. This man Jephthah was exiled. He was excommunicated and ostracized. According to [Deuteronomy 23:2](#), the Law of Moses would also bar him from the congregation of the Lord.

Being an illegitimate child is a handicap, to be sure, but many men have overcome it. There are kings, emperors, generals, poets, and popes who have been illegitimate children. William the Conqueror, for example, signed his name "William the Bastard," for that is what he was. That is what Jephthah was also, and he overcame this handicap, as we shall see.

Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him [Jud. 11:3].

Jephthah had become a leader of a band of desperados. Here is this man with three hurdles to surmount before he can become a leader for his country: he is the son of a harlot; he has been exiled by his brethren; and he is the leader of a despised, rejected group. He is not a very likely man to be used; but, you see, God uses men like this. God moves in mysterious ways, and He chooses men that are despised in this world. God also humbles those whom He intends to use. He humbled Joseph, He humbled Moses, and He humbled David. Our Lord humbled Himself. He is "despised and rejected of men." He is the "Stone which the builders rejected," but which was made the head of the corner. His enemies said, "We will not have this Man reign over us." Yet God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name.

There are those today, friend, who claim to be sons of God, but they are not. They are illegitimate in that they have not been born again. You can only become a legitimate son of God by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jephthah had been an exile, but now he is exalted.

And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:

And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead [Jud. 11:4-8].

The elders of Gilead have made Jephthah a pretty good proposition.

And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words [Jud. 11:9-10].

Jephthah makes things difficult for the elders of Gilead, but they have to swallow their pride and accept his terms. It was humiliating for the nation to appeal to this man whom they had exiled. And he makes it very clear that if he is going to be the judge and deliver them, then he is going to rule over them. Then he takes charge of things.

Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? [Jud. 11:11-12].

If you read the verses that follow this portion of Scripture, you will find an extended section where Jephthah outlines the way that the Ammonites came into the land. He makes it clear that the land really belonged to the Israelites who gained the land in a legitimate way. The Ammonites were, of course, attempting not only to drive the Israelites off the land, but were also trying to exterminate them. The same thing is happening in the land of Israel today. Especially since 1948 when Israel once again became a nation, the enemy has been trying to remove them from the land, exterminate them, actually drive them into the sea. I will not go over this section, but it will pay you to read it for the simple reason that Jephthah outlines a very sensible basis for Israel's occupation of the land. They had a legitimate claim to it.

Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon [Jud. 11:28-29].

The king of Ammon totally rejects the paper that Jephthah apparently had sent to him. He said he would not accept what had been said. So Jephthah leads his army against the Ammonites. But when he passes through the land and gets a look at the enemy, he

becomes a little fearful. Now he does something that under normal circumstances he probably would not have done. Remember that this man had spent years in exile and then suddenly he is exalted to the highest position in the land. He is made a judge. The natural reaction of a man who is suddenly elevated is excitement. In his excitement he makes a rash promise. Also remember that Jephthah did not have the light that we have today. He was one-half pagan with a heathen background. He did know God but not very well. God did not require him to make a vow.

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering [Jud. 11:30-31].

His cause was just, and God had given Jephthah every assurance that he would be victorious. This man did not need to make a rash vow like this, because God had not put the victory on that basis. It was the hand of God that had elevated him to this high position. He should have recognized that, since God had brought him that far, He would see him through. In [verse 29](#) of this chapter we were told that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. He did not need to add anything to that. Can you imagine saying, "Whatever comes out to meet me I will deliver it to the Lord?" After all, suppose it had been a friend or a neighbor. He would have no right to dedicate or offer that individual to the Lord.

And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back [Jud. 11:34-35].

Jephthah made a vow to God, and he feels that he cannot retract it.

The question is: did he offer his daughter in sacrifice? Let us look at this situation closely for a moment. The Scripture is silent concerning Jephthah's vow. It does not say whether he was right or wrong. Scripture never finds fault with him. In fact, [Hebrews 11:32](#) says, "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets." As you see, Jephthah is mentioned with a very fine group of men.

God's commandment is "Thou shalt not kill" ([Exod. 20:13](#)). God also gave rather specific instructions about offering children. We read in [Deuteronomy 12:31](#): "Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods." God says, "I won't ask you to do that, and you are not to do that, because it is pagan and heathen." God did not permit Abraham to offer Isaac. We need to recognize that fact. The whole point with Abraham and Isaac was how far Abraham was willing to go with God. As it turned out, he was willing to go all the way with God.

Abraham lifted that knife and, as far as he was concerned, Isaac was a dead boy. But as far as God was concerned, He would not let Abraham kill his son.

The construction used in the language in [verse 31](#) determines, I feel, the interpretation. Notice what Jephthah says, ". . . whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." I am going to change the reading of the last phrase just a little. It can read, "or I will offer up a burnt offering." Now Jephthah said he would do one of two things: he would offer a burnt offering or he would offer a gift to the Lord.

Did he offer his daughter as a burnt offering? I do not think that he did. What is meant is that he set her apart to perpetual virginity. So here is Jephthah -- he is illegitimate himself and he has only one daughter. He wants her to marry so he can have grandchildren. But his daughter is the one who comes forth through the doors to greet him, and he offers her up to the Lord. That means that she will never marry. You say to me, "Can you be sure of that?" Well, listen to what the girl says.

And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon [Jud. 11:36].

Notice that his daughter was obedient. She said that she would do whatever he had promised the Lord.

And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows [Jud. 11:37].

She did not understand his promise to be a burnt offering or sacrifice, but that she is not going to marry. Those are her intentions, and she is to bewail the fact of her virginity. She will not be presented as a bride to some man. Her life is to be dedicated to the Lord.

And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel.

That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year [Jud. 11:38-40].

This passage tells us that Jephthah's daughter did not get married. Instead she dedicated her life to the Lord. The word lament in [verse 40](#) means "to celebrate." Every year for four days Jephthah's daughter was remembered in a special way. She was totally dedicated to the Lord and His service. There is no indication that she was made a human sacrifice. People have argued about this story for years. I am asked that question as much as any other question: "Did Jephthah offer up his daughter in sacrifice?" No, he did not,

but that is not the point. God would not have permitted him to offer his daughter in a burnt sacrifice. The significant factor is that Jephthah kept his vow. His vow was something sacred. He did not trifle with it. It was a rash statement, to be sure, but it was not an idle boast. It was not a hollow promise. The Word of God has some severe and sharp things to say relative to making a vow. Notice what the Book of Ecclesiastes has to say about vows. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" ([Eccl. 5:2, 4-5](#)). My friend, you will do well to promise God only what you think you can execute. I am afraid that there are many Christians who go through a little ceremony. Perhaps they go down to an altar after a service, and by lighting a candle they dedicate themselves to God. Some folk dedicate and dedicate themselves until it actually smells to high heaven! God says, "Don't be rash with your mouth." He says that you are a fool if you make a vow to Him carelessly. You might think that over, Christian friend, in the next dedication service you attend. Don't rush down to the altar and offer God everything if you don't mean what you are saying. Jephthah was an illegitimate child. His mother was a harlot. He had a sweet, lovely daughter, and he wanted her to marry and have children. He unwittingly dedicated her to the Lord, but he kept his vow.

Christians today are notorious at making vows and breaking them. I noted this when I first began to move in Christian circles. As a young Christian, I went to a young people's conference and watched eighteen young people go forward and dedicate themselves to the Lord for full-time Christian service. I wouldn't go forward because I did not know whether I could make good my promise. May I say that out of all those who dedicated themselves to the Lord's service that night, not one of them entered full-time service! Have you made a vow to God? If you have, He wants you to keep it. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" ([2Tim 2:11-13](#)). Oh, He keeps His Word. Let us keep our word. "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil" ([2Thess. 3:3](#)). My, how wonderful He is, and how foolish we are today! Jephthah should be a lesson to us today.

Chapter 12

THEME: Jealousy of Ephraim; Judges Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon

Ephraim Is Punished (12:1-7)

And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.

And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me? [Jud. 12:1-3].

We have seen that the men of Ephraim also quarreled with Gideon (Jud. 8:1) when he didn't summon them to help him rout the Midianites. Now in a hostile way, they demanded that Jephthah give them the reason why he did not ask for their help in the battle. The jealousy of Ephraim was a real infection that led to a defection. Later on, when the kingdom is divided into north and south, you will find out that Ephraim is the center of all of the rebellion. And it goes back to their jealousy.

There is jealousy in the church today. It is one of our greatest problems. Paul said, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" ([Phil. 2:3](#)). "Strife and vainglory" can be vanity and envy. These are two things that cause problems in churches today. When I hear some person in a church complain that it is not being run the way he thinks it should be, I wonder if he is jealous. When I find someone who is opposing the preacher all of the time, I suspect there is jealousy behind it.

Jealousy was the problem here. Jephthah had to protect himself. The men of Ephraim were going to burn his house down right over his head!

Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand [Jud. 12:4-6].

The Gileadites were successful in defeating the Ephraimites, and they seized the Jordan fords so that the Ephraimites could not escape. Then they selected a password that would be difficult to pronounce because it contained a consonant which was not in the Ephraimite dialect. The word was Shibboleth. If a person's accent was not just right when he pronounced this word, he was in trouble. It is difficult for us to say certain words. Shibboleth was a word that was difficult for the Ephraimites to say because they could not put the "h" in it.

And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead [Jud. 12:7].

Jephthah's death ended six eventful years.

Ibzan, The Tenth Judge (12:8-10)

The next three judges mentioned were practically zeros. They did nothing. Well, they did something, but they did not judge Israel as they should have done.

And after him Ibzan of Beth-lehem judged Israel.

And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Beth-lehem [Jud. 12:8-10].

This judge is from Bethlehem. Bethlehem was one of the cities of Judah in the south. Ibzan had thirty sons and thirty daughters. I would have thought that he would have worked at getting his daughters husbands instead of getting wives for his sons. I suppose that in the seven years that he was judge he did not have time to get his daughters husbands too. He did not have time to judge Israel either. In other words, Ibzan was a man who gave all of his time to his family. There is nothing wrong with that, but it was not what he was called to do.

There is a great deal of nonsense abroad today about the subject of responsibility. I once heard the story of a preacher who was on his way to a speaking engagement and his little son wanted to talk with him. He sat down and talked to his son and missed his speaking engagement. Many people applauded him for that. Well, my friend, that man was breaking an engagement and also he was spoiling a child. You can show love and interest in your children without breaking an engagement. There is a time when certain things have to be put first. I think he would have better served the boy if he had told him, "Your daddy has a speaking engagement and that is important. You would want your daddy to keep that appointment, wouldn't you?" I think the little fellow would have agreed. Then the father could have continued, "Now when I return, you and I will talk these things over, or tomorrow we can have a chat." That would have done more for the boy than what the father did. All he did was make a spoiled brat out of the youngster, as I see it. I know I sound like a square, but I do not approve of judge Ibzan's actions. He didn't do anything. He is a picture of mediocrity, to be sure.

Elon, The Eleventh Judge (12:11-12)

And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun [Jud. 12:11-12].

These two verses tell us all that we know about Elon. He did nothing -- he didn't even have a large family. Apparently all that he did was twiddle his thumbs.

Abdon, The Twelfth Judge (12:13-15)

And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel.

And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years.

And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites [Jud. 12:13-15].

Abdon did nothing except "out-Jair" Jair. Talk about keeping up with the Jones family! As we have seen in chapter 10, Jair had thirty sons -- but Abdon had forty sons and thirty nephews besides. It must have been quite a sight to see that man ride out of town with his sons and nephews. You would have seen a parade of Jaguars, Mustangs, Pintos, and Cougars like you had never seen before. They call the little donkey the "mockingbird" or "lark" of the desert because he can really bray. Just think of all of those braying donkeys! That is all Abdon contributed. That isn't much, friend.

We have quickly passed over the last three judges, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, because apparently they did nothing constructive as judges.

CHAPTERS 13--16

Chapter 13

THEME: Seventh apostasy; Israel partially delivered through Samson

Forty Years Of Servitude Under The Philistines (13:1)

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years [Jud. 13:1].

The repeated apostasy of Israel forms the setting for a time of oppression by the Philistines. The Philistines were probably the worst enemies that Israel had. This time their oppression lasted for forty years.

During this time we come to a judge that we cannot pass over. His name was Samson, and he was one of the most outstanding of the judges. He probably had more glorious opportunity than any man ever had. Everything was propitious for a career and a brilliant future, but he failed. That is the tragedy of this man's life. He came to judge during the seventh apostasy and is, in one sense, the last of the judges. Israel was conquered by the Philistines and was only partially delivered by Samson. The small civil war that began in Jephthah's day got bigger and bigger, and the Book of Judges ends in absolute confusion. During Samson's time of leadership we are given the secret of his success, the secret of his strength, and the secret of his failure. Again, let me repeat, never was a man born with a more glorious opportunity than this man.

Birth Of Samson, The Thirteenth Judge (13:2-25)

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not [Jud. 13:2].

Zorah was a city between Dan and Judah, several miles west of Jerusalem. Manoah and his wife did not have any children because she was barren. So the birth of Samson was miraculous as was the birth of Isaac, or Joseph, or Benjamin.

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines [Jud. 13:3-5].

Before Samson was born, God marked him out. God raised him up to perform a gigantic task: he was to deliver Israel. The people of Israel were in a bad way because God had delivered them into the hands of the Philistines.

The angel of the Lord that appeared to the mother of Samson told her what her son was to be -- a Nazarite. You will recall that back in the Book of Numbers we are told what constituted a Nazarite vow. It was threefold: (1) He was not to touch strong drink or use grapes in any form. Why? Because wine is a symbol in the Scriptures of earthly joy. It is to cheer the heart. The Nazarite was to find his joy in the Lord. [Ephesians 5:18](#) says, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." If we want to please Christ, we, too, are to find our joy in Him. In fact, joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit -- "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)). Joy is one of the fruits the Holy Spirit wants to produce in your life and mine. (2) A Nazarite was not to cut his hair. Now what does that mean? In [1Corinthians 11:14](#) Paul says, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" The Scripture says that long hair dishonors a man. A Nazarite, however, would be willing to bear the shame of long hair, and that is the reason a razor was not to touch his head. (3) He was not to go near a dead body. There were to be no natural claims upon him. He had to put God first, above his relatives and loved ones. The Lord Jesus said in [Luke 14:26-27](#), "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." This simply means that we cannot put anything before Christ. This is something that we have lost sight of today.

Samson was a Nazarite. He was God's man, and that was the secret of the success he had. He was raised up for a great purpose, and his success was in God. Unfortunately he never succeeded in performing his God-appointed task. Did you notice what [verse 5](#) said? Samson began to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. Success knocked at his door. He was a beginner, not a finisher. He began to deliver Israel, but he never finished the task.

There are many Christians like that. They make a great beginning, but they do not finish a task. Paul said to the Galatians, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" ([Gal. 5:7](#)). They started out with a bang and ended up with a fizzle. Many people begin to read the Bible, but many fall by the wayside. They just begin and don't go on with it. I have been a pastor for forty years, friend, and I have known lots of

people who start something and never conclude it. They never finish what they are called to do.

And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol [Jud. 13:24-25].

These verses tell us the secret of Samson's strength. Samson's strength was not in his arms, although he killed a thousand Philistines with those arms. His strength was not in his back, although he carried the gates of Gaza on his back, which was a remarkable undertaking. And Samson's strength was not in his hair, although he was weak when it was cut. Samson was strong only when the Spirit of God was moving him. Just cutting his hair off was not actually what weakened him. His hair was the badge of his Nazarite vow. The Spirit of God was not on him when his hair was cut. Why? Because he had failed in his vow. He had not made good.

We see advertisements of body builders which show the man before and after. The before picture always features a little dried up weasel. After he takes the tonic, we see a great big muscle-bound man. Even though many people have pictured Samson as a big bruiser, he was probably one of the worst sissies in or out of the Bible. I think he was a little, dried-up milquetoast type of man. His name means "little sun." He had long hair. He was a riddle maker. He played pranks like a schoolboy. He allowed women to make a fool of him. He was not a he-man. He was not the strongest man in the Bible. He was the weakest man. This fellow was tied to his mama's apron strings like a little sissy, and that is exactly what he was. Then when the Spirit of the Lord began to move him, he was strong. When the Spirit was not upon him, he was as weak as water.

The people in Samson's day wanted to know the source of his strength. They did not realize that God chooses the weak things of this world to accomplish His purposes. They marveled at Samson, "How can this little scrawny, milquetoast fellow, perform these feats of tremendous strength?" There was only one explanation -- God did it.

Chapter 14

Samson Is Promised A Wife (14:1-4)

It is amazing that the Spirit of God would come upon a man like this. But it is obvious that God moved through him. I feel that he was a sissy in every department of his life, and in chapter 14 we begin to see it.

And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife [Jud. 14:1-2].

I submit to you that only a sissy would do a thing like that! Why didn't he go and talk to the woman and tell her that he loved her and wanted to marry her? Why didn't he go and talk to her father? In those days some sort of a business arrangement was always made

when it came to marriage. Why didn't he take care of that himself? Well, he is a sissy, and mamma and papa had to arrange the marriage for him. This is Samson.

Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel [Jud. 14:3-4].

Samson is going to use his marriage as a ruse in order that he might deliver Israel from the Philistines. He starts off well.

Samson Slays A Lion And Gives A Riddle (14:5-14)

Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him [Jud. 14:5].

We have been told that a Nazarite was to keep away from the grapes, but not Samson.

And the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion [Jud. 14:6-9].

On his way to Timnath with his parents, Samson was attacked by a lion. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him during this time of emergency and he killed the lion with his bare hands. During another trip Samson went to look at the carcass of the lion and discovered a swarm of bees and honey in it. He scooped the honey out with his hands and ate it. He also gave some to his parents, but he did not tell them where he got it. Remember that having contact with a carcass was a violation of the Nazarite law.

So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast,

and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments:

But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.

And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle [Jud. 14:10-14].

As was the custom, Samson put on a marriage feast. The feast was held at the bride's home. And all of the guests were Philistines. Riddles were a form of entertainment in those days, and Samson gave the guests a riddle. He gave them seven days in which to find the answer. If they guessed the riddle, then Samson would give them thirty linen garments and thirty cloaks. If they failed to guess the answer to his riddle, then they would have to give him thirty linen garments and thirty cloaks. Without knowing about the slain lion and the hive of bees in the carcass, there was no way the thirty guests could solve Samson's riddle.

Samson Is Deceived And Slays Thirty Philistines (14:15-20)

And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? is it not so?

And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?

And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.

And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down. What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle [Jud. 14:15-18].

The Philistines appealed to Samson's wife to help them find out the answer to the riddle. If she did not find out what his secret was, they threatened to burn down her father's house with her in it. Now the strongest weapon that a woman has is her tears, and Samson's wife turned hers on for seven days. I want to tell you that a woman who weeps for seven straight days, and at every meal, gets a little tiresome. Finally he had to give in and tell her the answer to the riddle. He was good at making wisecracks, too. He knew where these men got the answer to the riddle. Samson said, "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." In other words, "You got the answer from my wife."

And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house [Jud. 14:19].

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and he went down south to Ashkelon -- Ashkelon is way down in the south. There he killed thirty men in order to get thirty changes of raiment that he needed to pay off his wager. Samson left in a pout. Notice that he doesn't take his wife with him. He is angry with her for giving away his riddle.

But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend [Jud. 14:20].

So the father of the girl gives her to the best man at the wedding!

Chapter 15

Samson Burns The Philistine Crops (15:1-8)

But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her [Jud. 15:1-2].

After Samson's anger subsided, he went to visit his wife and brought a kid as a present. Her father informed Samson that he thought Samson no longer wanted her and so he had given her to his friend. Samson did not like this, of course.

And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.

And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives [Jud. 15:3-5].

Samson apparently felt justified in vengeance on the Philistines. He caught three hundred foxes, tied their tails together and then tied a torch on the tails, set them on fire, and let the animals loose in the fields. Of course these foxes would really take out on a run, and they would scatter the firebrands everywhere. Actually, friend, this entire episode is like a prank a juvenile would play! Samson certainly doesn't look like God's man here!

Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam [Jud. 15:6-8].

Notice that this is personal. This has nothing to do with his commission from God to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He is just avenging himself. His actions had nothing to do with delivering Israel. His revenge was personal.

Samson Slays One Thousand Philistines (15:14-15)

After smiting the Philistines with a great slaughter, Samson really had the enemy stirred up. They began looking for him, so he let his own people bind him with ropes in order to protect them from the Philistines.

And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands [Jud. 15:14].

The men of Judah took Samson, their prisoner, to Lehi which was occupied by the Philistines. The enemy was overjoyed to see Samson being brought to them bound. Then he broke the bands as if they were nothing. Again we see the strength of this man -- but not his own strength.

And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith [Jud. 15:15].

Samson grabbed the closest weapon, which was the jawbone of a donkey, and attacked the enemy. He killed one thousand of them. Notice the strength of this man. He could never have done such a thing in his own power of course; it was the Spirit of the Lord upon him that enabled him to do it. He is beginning to deliver Israel. If only he had kept that goal before him! But he did not, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter 16

Samson's Moral Frailty (16:1-3)

Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him [Jud. 16:1-2].

What a playboy Samson was! The men of the city locked up the city and they said, "We'll get him in the morning."

And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron [Jud. 16:3].

Samson got up at midnight and found the gates of the city locked. So what did he do? He took the gate, posts, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them away to the top of a hill that is before Hebron. That would have been about forty miles away. What he did sounds like a prank of a teenager or the trick of a college student. This boy Samson never did grow up. He has been called to deliver Israel with his mighty power, but all he does is use it for his personal advantage.

Samson And Delilah (16:4-23)

And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah [Jud. 16:4].

That is the story of Samson. That is the downfall of Samson. That is the big failure in his life. That is the weak point in his life -- "he loved a woman." No man falls suddenly into sin -- he does it gradually.

There was a bank president in my congregation when I pastored a church in Texas. This man went with me to the local jail to hand out tracts and talk to prisoners. Outwardly he was an outstanding man. One day he disappeared. He had gone on vacation. Suddenly the bank began to miss money. They could not believe that he had taken it. They tried to account for the loss in every other way, but they could not. They finally decided that he must be the one who took the money, and when he did not return from vacation, they began to search for him. After a complete investigation, they discovered that he had been taking money for years. No man falls suddenly into sin.

One of the greatest sins that destroys many a man today is this matter of illicit sex. That was Samson's sin -- "he loved a woman whose name was Delilah." As far as we know, he made no attempt to marry her.

And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.

And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man [Jud. 16:5-7].

You may be sure that Delilah was more interested in the silver than she was in Samson. Once again the Philistine leaders had found a way to get to Samson.

Notice that he teases her at first. He begins to give her answers, but they are wrong answers. He broke the cords with no effort at all. Still his strength was not known.

And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.

And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man [Jud. 16:10-11].

Again he is playing with her; he is kidding her along. He allowed her to tie him up with ropes. Then when she cried, "The Philistines are upon thee, Samson," he broke the ropes like they were a thread. Now Delilah is really exasperated. She is frustrated with her boy friend.

And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.

And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web [Jud. 16:13-14].

Now Samson is beginning to weaken. May I say to you, friend, this is the beginning of the end of this man. He is getting close to the truth now as he mentions his hair. But he is still teasing with her, and when she says "The Philistines are upon thee, Samson," he picks the whole thing up and walks away with it.

And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.

And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man [Jud. 16:15-17].

This time Delilah tells Samson that if he really loved her he would tell her the secret of his strength. So Samson told her that he was a Nazarite. Long hair, as you remember, was a badge of this vow. His strength was not in his hair but in the Spirit of God who came upon him. Delilah sees what a fool he really is -- and he is a fool.

And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him [Jud. 16:18-20].

When Samson went to sleep, Delilah had one of the Philistines come in and shave off his hair. Then for the fourth time Delilah cried out, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!" This is the tragic time in the life of Samson. He awoke out of his sleep, thinking he would do as he had done before, but "he knew not that the Lord was departed from him." Friend, the strength was not in his hair; the strength was in the Spirit of the Lord who was upon him.

Friend, our spiritual strength today is not in ceremonies or in rituals. The strength of the believer is always in the Spirit of God -- always.

Samson, called to be a judge for his people, called to deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines, is a carnal man. Now Ichabod (meaning "the glory is departed") is written over his life. He never raised an army. He never won a battle. He never rallied the men of Israel to him. Sex was the ruin of this man -- this man who was chosen by God!

But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand [Jud. 16:21-23].

Now we are coming to the tragic end of this man. After the Philistines captured Samson, they put out his eyes -- blinded him -- then forced him to do the work of a beast of burden in the prison. While he was in prison, his hair began to grow. He now has become a very repentant man.

The Philistines, of course, ascribe their victory over Samson to their god Dagon and hold a feast to celebrate.

Samson Is Avenged In His Death (16:25-31)

And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars.

And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.

Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport [Jud. 16:25-27].

To make their victory celebration complete, the Philistines have Samson brought from the prison. Then they make a fool of him. About three thousand men and women watch Samson being tormented.

And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years [Jud. 16:28-31].

Samson was a failure. He began to deliver Israel -- but he failed. He preferred to play with sin until the Spirit of God departed from him. Three significant verses tell his story:

1. SECRET OF SAMSON'S SUCCESS -- (16:25-31)

For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines (Jud. 13:5).

2. SECRET OF SAMSON'S STRENGTH -- (16:25-31)

And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol (Jud. 13:25).

3. SECRET OF SAMSON'S FAILURE -- (16:25-31)

And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him (Jud. 16:20).

Note the parallel between the life of Samson and that of Jesus Christ:

Comparison:

1. Both births were foretold by an angel.
2. Both were separated to God from the womb.
3. Both were Nazarites.
4. Both moved in the power of the Holy Spirit.
5. Both were rejected by their people.
6. Both destroyed (or will destroy) their enemies.

Contrast:

1. Samson lived a life of sin; Jesus' life was sinless.

2. Samson at the time of death prayed, "O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."
3. In death, Samson's arms were outstretched in wrath; In death, Jesus' arms were outstretched in love.
4. Samson died. Jesus Christ lives!

CHAPTERS 17 AND 18

Chapter 17

THEME: Religious apostasy -- the temple

Religious Confusion In Israel (17:1)

In chapters 17 -- 21 we have presented the philosophy of history that was mentioned at the beginning of this book. We have seen it illustrated in Judges as the hoop of history rolls over and over. It starts with Israel in the place of blessing. They are serving God. Then there is a departure from God and they do evil. They follow their own way. Then they are sold into slavery. In their slavery and servitude they cry out to God for deliverance. Then they turn to God and repent. Then God raises up judges to deliver them. Then Israel comes back to the place of blessing and becomes a nation that serves God. Just when everything is back in order, they lapse into sin and turn from God again. Altogether Israel went through seven apostasies. This gives us the philosophy of history. Every nation goes down in this order: (1) religious apostasy; (2) moral awfulness; (3) political anarchy. Deterioration begins in the temple, then to the home, and finally to the state. That is the way a nation falls.

This period of apostasy began in the tribe of Dan in their desire to enlarge their borders. It was another lapse into idolatry. It all can be traced to the home of Micah and his mother who spoiled him. The priest, hired by Micah to tend his idols, advised Dan to proceed with a selfish plan. This was the sweet talk of a hired preacher.

Idolatry In Ephraim (17:1-13)

And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son [Jud. 17:1-2].

Micah is an example of a spoiled brat. He is a mama's boy. He knew that his mother had been saving some money, and he decided to steal it. His mother, not knowing who stole the money, pronounced a curse on the thief. So he confessed to being the thief, and instead of his mama turning him across her knee and applying the board of education to the seat of knowledge, she congratulated him. She said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son."

And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee [Jud. 17:3].

When Micah returned the money to his mother, she told him that she had dedicated that money to the Lord to make a graven image and a molten image. You see, they have gone off into idolatry! So she turns around and gives it back to him. You know, there are a lot of Christians today that are just that inconsistent. She was dedicating the money to the Lord but using it to make an idol! Many groups take up an offering and say it is for the Lord, then use most of it for the church social on Friday night. They say the money is dedicated to the Lord, but actually it is honoring the god of pleasure.

And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes [Jud. 17:5-6].

Micah had a house of gods. His mother provided the silver for the idols, and Micah provided a shrine for them. He also made an ephod and teraphim to complete the furnishings of the shrine. Then, to top it all off, he consecrated one of his sons to be his priest. They had come to the place where "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

And the man departed out of the city from Beth-lehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place.

And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in [Jud. 17:7-10].

It must have bothered Micah a little that he had made his son a priest. So, when this unemployed itinerant preacher came by, Micah hired him. This Levite from Beth-lehem-judah became his private family priest. Here is a priest who is like a hired preacher who becomes a messenger boy of a church board or of a little group. God have mercy on the church that has this kind of a preacher. This Levite has now become a priest and has a house full of idols.

And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest [Jud. 17:11-13].

This chapter is certainly a revelation of the low spiritual ebb to which the nation Israel had come. Here is a man who thinks just because he has a Levite for his preacher that that is all he needs. How tragic is that kind of thinking. Yet Micah expected the blessing of God upon him. And how many people are like that today?

Chapter 18

Idolatry In Dan (18:1-31)

The Danites had been assigned territory that was occupied by the mighty Philistines. They felt that they needed more room in which to live. There was no king in Israel. It was a time of utter confusion. There was no leadership.

In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel [Jud. 18:1].

You will recall in the Book of Joshua that none of the tribes took possession of all the land that was coming to them. That certainly was true of the tribe of Dan way in the north. The Danites had a real problem. In fact, it was so bad they took to the hills.

And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there [Jud. 18:2].

These men went out to see what territory the tribe of Dan could take in order to extend and expand the borders of their tribe. During their travels they came to the house of Micah.

When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here?

And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest [Jud. 18:3-4].

This man is nothing but a hired preacher. (God have mercy on the church that has a hired preacher who chooses to be a messenger boy for a little group rather than to preach and teach the Word of God, without fear, without favoritism, and without compromise.) This Levite has compromised. This is a period of compromise, corruption, and confusion, which are the marks of apostasy at any time. We are in a state of apostasy today. The church has compromised. It is in a state of corruption and confusion. Our problem is that it is not returning to its authority, which is the Word of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ who is revealed in the Word of God.

And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go [Jud. 18:5-6].

This is the sweet talk of a hired preacher who says what people want to hear. The five men left and thought what the Levite told them was great.

And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.

When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war [Jud. 18:9-11].

A good report is brought back by the spies who suggest that the Danites should possess Laish. So a party of six hundred warriors is formed, and they take with them their families and possessions. On the way back to Laish, they stop by Micah's house and rob him of his idols and his priest. Then the Danites capture Laish, burn it, rebuild it, and live in it. They rename the city Dan.

And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh [Jud. 18:30-31].

Here is a picture of real apostasy, friend. Who is Jonathan? He happens to be the grandson of Moses! These people had gone a long way from God. Remember that Moses had said, speaking for the Lord, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" ([Exod. 20:3-4](#)). And here is Moses' grandson, a priest with an idol! This is tragic.

When I was a young man studying for the ministry, I was shocked to learn some of the things that were going on within the organized church. Because I had not been brought up in the church, it was a new world and a new life for me. I was deeply impressed with the life and ministry of Dwight L. Moody and considered him a real saint of God -- which he was, by the way. Then a man who knew him and knew his family told me, "One of his sons holds an office in the most liberal organization in this country." During those early days nothing hurt me as that did. I just couldn't understand how a son of a man like Moody could depart from the gospel of Jesus Christ and from the integrity and inerrancy of the Word of God!

My friend, apostasy is an awful thing. And a nation's problems begin with religious apostasy. This is what happened to the nation of Israel. Here we see Moses' grandson serving as priest with Micah's graven image!

Chapter 19

THEME: Moral awfulness -- the home

As we have seen in the preceding section, the downfall of a people begins with religious apostasy. From there it moves on to the second stage, which is moral awfulness. This is graphically illustrated in the frightful episode which concludes the Book of Judges. It centers about the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe engaged in gross immorality which led to civil war. It began with the men of Benjamin abusing and finally murdering a Levite's concubine. The other tribes try to exterminate the tribe of Benjamin. This period ends in total national corruption and confusion and with this the Book of Judges concludes: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25).

And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah.

And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there four whole months [Jud. 19:1-2].

These two verses give us another insight into the life of the children of Israel of that day, and it is a good illustration of Romans chapters 1 -- 3. Can you imagine a Levite marrying a woman like that? Well, he did, and she played the harlot, left him, and went back to her father's house. This Levite followed her, was warmly received by her father, and stayed several days. Then the Levite and his concubine left and headed northward. They stayed one night in Gibeah, a city of the Benjamites. An old man who was also from mount Ephraim and was sojourning in Gibeah offered them hospitality. That night, while they were being entertained by their host, some men of the city demanded (as was done in Sodom before its destruction) the Levite for their homosexual gratification. Believing it would mean final death for him, he gave them instead his concubine. They abused her all night and absolutely caused her death by raping her. This horrible act sounds like something that could have happened in our country -- does it not? In fact, the parallel to our contemporary society is quite striking as you read through this section.

The Levite was really wrought up by this crime, and what he did reveals how low they were in that day. He took her and cut her up in pieces, then sent a piece to each tribe with a message of what had taken place!

The reaction of the rest of the nation to this outrage is recorded in the next two chapters.

CHAPTERS 20 AND 21

Chapter 20

THEME: Political anarchy -- the state

Following religious apostasy, then moral awfulness, the next step downward in the life of Israel (and of every nation) is political anarchy. We see this in the last two chapters of the Book of Judges.

When the tribes of Israel received a part of this dismembered woman with the message of what had taken place in Gibeah, they were incensed against the tribe of Benjamin. They believed the law should be enforced. In that respect they had not sunk as low as we have today in our philosophy that lawlessness should be permitted and we should have as little law as possible. They gave Benjamin an opportunity to deliver up the offenders, but instead Benjamin declared war against the other eleven tribes! So the tribes assembled together and came against Benjamin.

Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh.

And the chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword [Jud. 20:1-2].

Apparently the tribe of Benjamin had a tremendous army. We are given an interesting sidelight here:

Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss [Jud. 20:16].

I heard a liberal speak for fifteen minutes one time on the fact that David could not have been accurate enough to hit Goliath on the forehead. Consider this verse. These men were as accurate in that day with their slings as we are today with our missiles. If they could get in the range of a slingshot, it would be fatal for anyone. These left-handed men could split a hair!

This same liberal said that the reason David picked up five stones was so that he would have a reserve supply in case he missed with the first stone. Well, that liberal was wrong. Goliath had four sons in the army of the Philistines, and David had a stone for each one of them. David knew how accurate he was.

Now the men of Benjamin were overcome by sheer numbers. In fact, the tribe of Benjamin was almost destroyed.

And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour.

And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.

So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valour [Jud. 20:44-46].

The people in the tribe of Benjamin were judged because of their gross immorality. What a tragic thing it was for so many to die. This was the favorite tribe. Benjamin, you will

recall, was the youngest son of old Jacob, and a favorite son. Benjamin was the one for whom Judah was willing to lay down his life. He occupied a place next to Judah.

Unfortunately gross immorality had taken place and had set tribe against tribe and class against class. Then what happened? It led to political anarchy. First there was religious apostasy in the temple, then moral awfulness in the home, and finally political anarchy in the state. These are the steps that any nation takes that goes down.

The final chapter in the Book of Judges deals with the mourning for Israel's lost tribe and the provision the people made for its future.

The slaughter of the Benjamites caused Israel to be faced with a new problem. Almost the entire tribe of Benjamin had been destroyed, and the other tribes vowed not to let their daughters marry any of the few remaining Benjamites. Exactly how was the tribe of Benjamin going to be preserved? Before the war, the Israelites had made another vow. They said that any who refused to come to Mizpeh and fight would be put to death. They found out that the men of Jabesh-gilead had not responded to the appeal, and so the command went out for twelve thousand men of Israel to kill the males of Jabesh-gilead, marry the women, and bring the virgins back to the camp at Shiloh. These virgins then became wives to four hundred Benjamites. A means was also found to get wives for the remaining Benjamites and to rebuild the cities that had been destroyed in the fighting.

This period ends in total national corruption and confusion. The final verse concludes the sordid story of the Book of Judges:

Chapter 21

Political Anarchy -- The State (continued) (21:25)

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes [Jud. 21:25].

Here in this twentieth century the heads of state would do well to study the Book of Judges. Back in 1928, when the depression first began, a brief editorial appeared in the staid Wall Street Journal, which went something like this:

What America needs today is not Government controls, industrial expansion, or a bumper corn crop; America needs to return to the day when grandpa took the team out of the field in the early afternoon on Wednesday in order to hitch them to the old spring wagon into which grandma put all of the children after she washed their faces shining clean; and they drove off to prayer meeting in the little white church at the crossroads underneath the oak trees, where everyone believed the Bible, trusted Christ, and loved one another.

Where did our trouble begin? Because our trouble is primarily spiritual, it actually goes back to the church. The church went into apostasy. Then our problems centered in the home with the drug problem and the generation gap. Trouble has now moved into political circles, and we have anarchy. People say, "If we could just change this or that and put in this party or that party, everything would be fine." All of this is perfect nonsense. What we need today is to get back to a spiritual foundation. That is where we went off the track, and that is where our troubles began. We have seen in the Book of Judges the philosophy of history, and the hoop of history is still rolling. Frankly, I am

disturbed because it has never changed. We today are in the midst of political anarchy. God have mercy on America!

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